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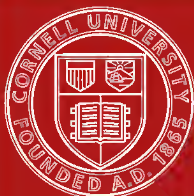

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A NEW PRIMER OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

BY THE SAME AUTHORS

Illustrative Prose and Verse

A COMPANION TO

A New Primer of English Literature

(4/6)

THIS volume is intended to convey a clearer comprehension and a greater interest in the first study of our National Literature. It contains chapters on Langland, Maundeville, Chaucer, Malory, Skelton, James I. of Scotland, Dunbar, Ascham, Wyatt, Surrey, Spenser, Elizabethan Sonnets, Elizabethan Lyrics, Lyly, Sidney, Elizabethan Dramatic Verse, Bacon, Hooker, Milton, Lovelace, Herbert, Vaughan, Herrick, Donne, Taylor, Browne, Earle, Dryden, Bunyan, Pope, Swift, Thomson, Defoe, Addison, Johnson, Goldsmith, Gibbon, Burke, Collins, Gray, Cowper, Blake, Burns, Scott, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats, De Quincey, Hazlitt, Lamb, Carlyle, Macaulay, Ruskin, Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Dickens, and Thackeray, also notes in the margin or at foot which are intended to assist the reader without relieving him of the necessity for careful attention and independent thought.

A NEW PRIMER

OF

ENGLISH LITERATURE

BY

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PREFACE

An ideal Primer of English Literature would possess many virtues. It would be sound in its facts, clear in its arrangement, simple in its expression, sparing and circumspect in its criticisms. Its merits would appear not only in what it said, but in what it left unsaid. It would not only omit inconsiderable names; it would omit names which, without deserving to be called inconsiderable, are at least hardly to be considered in a first survey. It would be extremely economical in the mention of dates. Its object would be simply to provide an intelligent bird's-eye view of the whole stream of our literary history.

Ideals are as difficult to realise in this domain as in any other, and we cannot hope to have fully achieved our own aims. Nevertheless, we trust that the present effort will find sufficient justification in the eyes of students and teachers, from whom we should welcome any suggestions for its improvement.

The authors are jointly and equally responsible for the work throughout.

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A NEW PRIMER OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

1. The Beginnings of Literature. When a nation has reached some degree of civilisation it begins to form what is known as a "literature." Here and there an individual endowed with more or less imagination, gift of language, and ear for rhythmic sound, is minded to exercise these faculties in "literary creation." That is to say, he composes something which is meant to awaken interest and pleasure in those who hear it. The subjects which he chooses will be such as naturally interest and entertain the people of his day. In early times, and among simple folk, such compositions mostly take the shape of stories, which relate the exploits of great heroes and leaders, or of supernatural beings. Among a warlike people the achievements are commonly those of battle. The deeds themselves are rendered as marvellous as possible. It is only gradually that other themes are one by one made the subjects of composition; but the more thoughtful and cultivated a people becomes, the more does it ask to be interested and entertained by creations full of thought and refinement. This process of increasing the

kinds of composition, and of both enlarging and refining their character, is called the "literary development" of a people. To give an account of that development is to describe its "literary history."

2. Literature in its Infancy is Verse. The first creations of primitive peoples were not written, inasmuch as writing was as yet barely known, if known at all. This was the case not only among the earliest Greeks and other ancients, but among our own ancestors. The only manner of spreading the compositions above described was by word of mouth. The period during which this state of things lasted is consequently called the period of "oral transmission." One person learned from another the whole or a part, and repeated it in his turn. It is not surprising, therefore, that the first efforts of composition are everywhere made in some form of verse. Not only was it necessary that the matter should be interesting; it was necessary also that the language should be as easy as possible to remember, and as agreeable as possible to the ear of the listener. But verse is easier to remember than prose, as we find when we ourselves recall the number of days in the months by repeating: "Thirty days hath September," etc. Moreover, singing is more agreeable to simple ears than mere speech, and it is verse which is adapted to a narrative told in singing. Regularly, therefore, in these primitive times, the composer or "maker" was a "*song*smith" or "poet," in the sense of being a writer of verses. It is interesting to note that "poet" is itself but the Greek word *poiētēs*, which simply means "maker," and the use of the word shows that "making" originally implied verse-making. The verse of the early maker did not necessarily rhyme; in fact, in Europe rhyme is a comparatively modern device; but it possessed a regular rhythm and swing which assisted the memory

and gratified the ear. During the period of oral transmission, those who repeated the composition usually did so to the accompaniment of a harp or similar musical instrument. But, since not everyone possessed the best of memories or of musical power, there arose a special class of "minstrels," who travelled about, chanting the song-stories which they had either composed or learned. In Greece such men were called "rhapsodists," among the Celtic peoples "bards," among the Norsemen "scalds," and among the Anglo-Saxons "gleemen." It is not only a feature of the orally transmitted compositions that they are in verse. When the authors had once found what they considered to be the most vivid or pleasing epithet or phrase (such as a "flashing sword," or a "sea-riding ship") they did not scruple to employ it as often as they chose. This also aided the memory, while the audience welcomed these old friends with ready appreciation. Early Anglo-Saxon "epic" poetry (or narrative of exploit) is precisely like early Greek or any other epic in this respect. This old poetry is often extremely picturesque, as well as wholesome and sincere.

3. Development of Prose, and of a Literary History. As the art of writing became slowly diffused, the notion of reading, in place of listening, was diffused also. This naturally took place at first only among the more studious and more serious classes. While the illiterate continued to rejoice only in the wonderful stories and songs of the minstrel, the lettered portions of the community were glad also to read records of more sober facts, which eventually grew into what we should call history; or they sought instruction or entertainment in various forms of knowledge. These, being put together by equally studious writers, and not being intended to be learned off and sung, no longer had recourse to verse, but

were expressed in prose,* which was at first crude and awkward, but which continually acquired more ease and elegance of expression. Along with the development of society, and of its thoughts and feelings, there has grown an endless variety of subject and style in prose. Meanwhile verse literature also has perpetually widened its themes and sought new forms, new powers, and new charms. The "history of English literature" follows the budding and blossoming of the various forms of both verse and prose. It surveys the effort of successive English writers to deal interestingly and helpfully with all matters for which the world of their day has cared. It observes how prose and verse, working together, have sought to satisfy, or to stimulate, in some newer or fuller way, the reason, the curiosity, the emotions, or the imagination of each generation, and so to help in its delight or advancement. "English Literature" embraces all English writing which can claim to have performed these services in a noteworthy degree.

4. The Kinds of Poetry. Literature, then, consists of prose literature and verse literature. It is customary to call these respectively the "prose" and the "poetry" of a nation, and, though it is something deeper than the mere verse form which makes a composition true "poetry," we must for convenience use the terms in that customary way.

Of poetical literature there are certain chief kinds, which bear special names, and with these and their meaning the student must make himself familiar. The poem which narrates the progress and fulfilment of some great event—whether partly real or wholly imaginary—and tells of it with fulness and dignity, is called an EPIC.† Such a

* *Prosa* (*oratio*) in Latin means language following the direct course; *versa* (*oratio*) is language which adopts inverted orders, and the like.

† In Greek *epē*="verses," and the first verses dealt with this kind of subject. See Sec. I.

poem is to be found in Milton's *Paradise Lost.* Sometimes, since the action centres round some great figure called the hero, this form of composition is called HEROIC. When a poem narrating unusually striking events and exploits—generally imaginary, but sometimes based on facts—does not pretend to the dignity and scope of an epic, but is otherwise of a similar nature, it is commonly called a ROMANTIC* poem. Of such a kind are *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* and the *Marmion* of Scott, the oriental tales of Byron, and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King.* Other stories and legends in verse, such as most of the *Canterbury Tales* of Chaucer, are simply said to belong to NARRATIVE poetry. Poems which are intended to act upon, or to express, the feelings, emotions, or "passions" (in the proper sense of that word†)—such as those of love, joy, sorrow, devotion, courage, patriotism—are generally of such a nature that they are suited to chanting or song, and, since such song was originally accompanied by the lyre or harp, they are known as LYRIC. To this class belong the compositions known as ODES,‡ (such as those of Milton, Shelley, and Keats), BALLADS, SONGS, and others. A piece of this kind dealing with grief or with pathetic reflections (as in Shelley's *Adonais*, Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, and the best poem of Gray) is called an ELEGY.§ When the poem is written, like the plays of Shakespeare, in acts and scenes, with dialogue spoken by the characters, the whole being intended for (or at least

* So styled because resembling the *romans* or French tales in verse, which, again, bore that name because they were written in the *lingua romana* of France. There are other senses of "romantic," as in "romantic" opposed to "classical," or in "a romantic age," and the like. These will be explained later.

† The Latin *passio* means any manner in which the mind is moved or excited.

‡ *Ōdē* is the Greek for "song."

§ Greek *elegos*, a lament.

suited to) performance before spectators, it is called a DRAMA,* and is a part of DRAMATIC poetry.

The three most important divisions of poetry are the epic, dramatic, and lyric. The first tells us of persons and actions, the second presents them as passing before our eyes, the third makes us realise and share in lively emotions. But, besides these, verse literature has sought to argue or teach, as in Pope's *Essay on Man*. In this case it is called PHILOSOPHICAL or DIDACTIC† verse. It has, again, taken ridicule for its province, in which case it is called SATIRE, as in Butler's *Hudibras*. It has described things and places, as in Thomson's *Seasons* and Pope's *Windsor Forest*, and is then called DESCRIPTIVE verse. There are also other miscellaneous kinds of verse compositions, with which acquaintance will be made in due season.

5. Terms used in speaking of Poetry. Verse is always distinguished from prose by at least a pronounced RHYTHM,‡ that is, by the swing or lilt with which the syllables follow each other. The beat of the accented syllables and the intervals between them are not left to chance, as they may be in prose, but are ordered by the watchful ear of the composer. When the rhythm is arranged on so definite a plan that there are a certain number of accented and unaccented syllables measured out to a line, the poem is said to have METRE.§ If there is no rhyme,|| the piece is said to be in BLANK VERSE. When a set of metrical lines are combined into a group, and this is answered by other sets of the same form, each

* *Drāma* is Greek for a thing done or performed.

† *Philosophia* in Greek is the pursuit of wisdom; *didaskō* = "I teach."

‡ Greek *rhythmos* = regulated flow.

§ Greek *metron* = measure.

|| Properly the spelling is *rime*, but it has been contaminated by *rhythm*. The meaning is "number," and properly includes any metrical verse.

such group is called a STANZA,* though popularly it is often known as a "verse." A stanza of four lines is called a *quatrain*, of six lines a *sestine*, of eight lines an *octave stanza*. Two successive lines rhyming are called a COUPLET. A section (or chapter) of a long poem was called in old English a "fyt" (or "fytte,") but is now known as a CANTO.†

6. Kinds of Prose Literature. Of prose the chief kinds are HISTORY, BIOGRAPHY (*i.e.*, the narrative of individual lives), and DESCRIPTION, which tell of events, facts, and scenes, imparting knowledge and satisfying our natural curiosity; PHILOSOPHY, CRITICISM, and ESSAYS, which argue and reason concerning right and wrong principles of conduct or thinking or judging of art and literature, or other matters of thought; works of WIT, HUMOUR, and SATIRE, which either simply entertain us or else promote some serious object of the author; prose DRAMAS (like those of Sheridan); LETTERS; and works of FICTION, including all forms of the novel. But treatises which are purely scientific, or dry and threadbare chronicles and statements of mere facts, are not regarded as "literature." Not everything that is written is necessarily literature, but only those compositions which show a certain power or beauty or attractiveness in the writing itself, or a skill—called "artistic"—in the manner in which the subject is handled so as to create and maintain our interest.

Sometimes prose attempts to deal with the same purely emotional themes as (for example) lyric poetry. It will generally be found that it then adopts a choicer language and a distinct character of rhythm, though not of metre.

* *Stanza* is Italian for a stopping-place or point.

† *Canto* in Italian means a song, and such a section was supposed to be enough for a minstrel to sing at one time

In these circumstances it is frequently called "poetical prose" or "prose poetry," the truth being that the author's mind, while he is writing, is in much the same stirred and singing condition as would lead another writer to express himself in actual verse.

7. Periods in Literary History. The history of a nation's literature is commonly and with good reason divided into periods. It has already been said that authors in general write concerning those things which their contemporaries most care to hear about. These vary greatly from generation to generation, and when we stand at a sufficient distance of time and look back over the field of English writing, we are able clearly to distinguish such differences. For instance, when the most admired quality of men is valour and prowess, and when interest is chiefly centred on warlike exploits, the favourite (though not, of course, the only) themes of writers will be those of battle and chivalrous adventure. But when peace has long reigned, and people are more concerned with the quiet aspects and arts of society, literature may perhaps indulge especially in delineating the experiences and characters of the various types of men and women around. Nor is it only the themes which change. New ways of presenting thoughts, that is, new styles, and even tricks, of writing, are attempted by way of novelty, and these also are conspicuous in the history of literature. If, therefore, we glance backward from the twentieth century, we can plainly discern a succession of literary tastes differing in these two respects, namely, in subject and in style. We may call these literary fashions, or "literary periods." At this distance they stand out like the several bars of colour in the rainbow. But as you examine the colours of the rainbow or the prism more nearly, it is impossible to say exactly where one colour begins and another ends,

inasmuch as they shade off into each other. So it is equally true of our literary periods that they shade off into each other by subtle gradations. We cannot draw a hard and fast line of distinction at some definite year. Nevertheless, when we survey the whole series "in the large," we are justified in assigning names and characters to periods lying between certain dates which are sufficiently near to the truth. There is, for example, an "Early Nineteenth Century" period easily distinguishable from an "Eighteenth Century" period. Thus the themes and treatment of the nineteenth century are in general remarkably full of freedom and fervour and variety of feeling and imagination, while those of the eighteenth are for the most part remarkably formal, limited, and matter-of-fact.

Different handbooks offer somewhat different titles for the several periods of English literature, and they assign somewhat different dates for their commencement and close, but in the main they sufficiently agree, for the simple reason that no competent reader can well fail to observe very much the same changes. If the names of kings or queens occur in the titles of literary periods, it is not because the periods lasted just as long as the reigns of those monarchs, nor because the actions of the kings or queens had necessarily anything to do with the character of the literature produced; but it is simply because the names of the sovereigns often serve as convenient historical landmarks for "placing" the periods in question.

8. Differences between Periods. This topic is one of the greatest importance, and therefore, before we proceed to divide English literature into its periods, we should do well to consider a little further these changes and their causes. It is with literature as with social customs, or dress, or furniture. If we look at the history of manners we shall find a time of roughness and coarseness, a time

of elaborate "Chesterfieldian" etiquette abounding in courtesies and compliments, and a time of frank and easy intercourse without much attention to formalities. In furniture we may see a period of gilt and glass and straight-backed comfortless chairs arranged about a room with strict symmetry; then a period of the massive and imposing; and then again a prevalence of the light and artistic. And as with these, so with literature, the altered fashion is due to certain causes: it is partly the outcome of our mere natural and human desire of novelty, partly it is the result of new conditions or ideas working in society. In literature the changes generally indicate some alteration in a nation's circumstances, in its disposition, its moral attitude, or its enlightenment. Read some quantity of the poetry of Spenser in the age of Elizabeth, then of Pope in the age of Anne, and again of Tennyson in the age of Victoria. It can escape no one that there is a distinct unlikeness, not merely in their language and style of versification but also in their subjects, and in their way of looking at matters affecting life or the feelings. First the sweet rich nobility of the language of Spenser, his prodigal imagery, his allegorical and moral matter; second, the cold, precisely expressed, clever, but rather monotonous couplet of Pope, and the absence of deep feelings or bold imagination in his work; third, the delicately-chosen diction and varied rhythms of Tennyson, together with his human sympathies and moral breadth. These are marks, not only of three individual writers, but also of three literary epochs. There is a close family resemblance between Spenser and Sidney, or Shakespeare in his sonnets; with Pope we may set Addison and Johnson; with Tennyson we may place Matthew Arnold and William Morris.

If we consider how literature at different dates has

treated external nature, we shall find something like this. In the days of Chaucer any appreciation of inanimate nature is of the simplest and least imaginative kind. Chaucer and his contemporaries loved the daisy, and the month of May, and "to hear the blissful briddës how they singë." They loved the springtime, with its sweet sounds, and sights, and perfumes. But they were not conscious of any deep agitations or mysterious longings roused by a "spirit in the woods." Pass on now to the eighteenth century, the epoch of Thomson's *Seasons*. Here Nature, as seen by an observant eye, is described point by point for description's sake. Evidently readers of the time were expected to enjoy the happily accurate picturing of the many interesting details of a scene of winter or of autumn. But at the beginning of the nineteenth century, with Wordsworth and Shelley, a new spirit has swept over literature in this respect. These writers and their followers can never have enough of surrendering, not their eye, but their soul, to the beauty and awe of Nature, and to its suggestions through their emotions. A waterfall can "haunt" them "like a passion."

9. Causes of the Changes. The literature of a people is the "expression of its mind and soul." At a given period it shows what that people is minded, for the time being, to read, to think about, to be amused with, or to be made to feel. The changes in a literature, apart from the love of novelty, are therefore due to changes, perhaps transitory, in the people's mind and soul. To explain why a nation's mind and interests change we must, of course, study history, and it is with the study of history that the study of literature should always go hand in hand. The most potent cause of change is to be found in the movements—political,

religious, or educational—of the community. Some great national event, such as the Norman Conquest; some great new enthusiasm, such as that of the New Learning or that of the Puritans; some great series of discoveries, such as those in the age of Elizabeth; some great disaster or, on the contrary, period of prosperity, may change the prevailing way of looking at ourselves and the world around us, or it may give us fresh occupations and interests. "Revivals" and "Renascences" occur periodically.

A second cause of variation is the coming in, whether gradually or suddenly, of literary lessons and influences from abroad, as of Italian literature in the sixteenth century, of French in the seventeenth, and of German at the end of the eighteenth. A third is the occasional rise of some transcendent original genius. But along with these three causes there must always be reckoned the natural tendency to grow weary at last of anything familiar, however good.

10. The Periods of English Literature. Now that we have explained in what spirit the titles and dates assigned to the several periods are to be accepted, we may state the divisions which will be adopted in this book. They are:—

	About A.D.
1. ANGLO-SAXON, Pre-Conquest (or First-English)	500-1066
2. ANGLO-NORMAN, Pre-Chaucerian (or Transition-English)	1066-1340
3. CHAUCERIAN (or Middle English)	1340-1400
4. POST-CHAUCERIAN (or Renascence Transition)	1400-1575
(*a*) THE BARREN AGE	1400-1510
(*b*) TUDOR REVIVAL	1510-1575

	About A.D.
5. ELIZABETHAN (or Age of Shakespeare)	1575-1625
6. CAROLINE * (or Seventeenth Century) -	1625-1700
(*a*) PERIOD OF CIVIL STRIFE (Age of Milton) -	1625-1660
(*b*) RESTORATION (Age of Dryden)	1660-1700
7. AUGUSTAN † or QUEEN ANNE (Age of Pope)	1700-1745
8. MIDDLE GEORGIAN (Age of Johnson)	1745-1795
9. LATER GEORGIAN or Early Nineteenth Century (Age of Wordsworth)	1795-1832
10. VICTORIAN	since 1832

* So called from Charles I. (Latin *Carolus*) and his family.

† So called because the literary conditions and aims were supposed to resemble those under the Roman Emperor Augustus.

CHAPTER II

ANGLO-SAXON (PRE-CONQUEST) LITERATURE (A.D. 500-1066)

12. The Coming of the Anglo-Saxons. Before the government of the Roman Empire formally abandoned Great Britain in A.D. 410, a great deal had been done to civilise the Celtic * inhabitants. In the southern parts of the island, Britain was in fact a Roman-Celtic country, with walled towns, pleasure resorts, country houses, and great roads. Christianity had also made much spread. But a century later the face of the country and the state of the inhabitants had greatly changed. From the year 449 till about the year 580 body after body of Teutonic (or Germanic) tribes came pouring over from the regions which now include the south of Denmark, Schleswig-Holstein, Hanover, and the Frisian coast. The language of these tribes was practically the same Low German,† differing only in trifling local peculiarities known as dialect. All were heathens in their religion, and their customs and stock of legends may be called identical.

To the outer world the chief of these tribes were known as Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, and of these the Angles took the east and centre of Britain as far as the Forth, while the Saxons settled over the southern portion from Essex to Dorsetshire, the Jutes occupying

* Pronounce this word as Keltic (as indeed it is sometimes written).

† "Low German" is German of the lower countries towards the coast; "High German" is that of the interior or high land.

Kent. It is usual to speak of these peoples as the "Anglo-Saxons," but that name was unknown to themselves. When they had become sufficiently advanced to produce written records they are found to call themselves *Engles*, and their language *Englisc*.

Their settlement in Britain necessarily meant incessant conflict with the British Celts, whom they called "Welsh" (*i.e.*, "foreigners"). These they continually pressed westward, slaying many and enslaving some, but also frequently mingling their own race with some amount of the Celtic. At the completion of the "Anglo-Saxon settlement" in Britain the Celtic Britons, or "Welsh," fill the peninsula of Cornwall and Devon, the modern Wales, and also Strathclyde. These have carried with them certain legends and traditions of their own, which are sung by their bards, and which are often of a wildly imaginative character, full of a brooding melancholy, but also of a tender and chivalrous spirit. From among these were destined to come back into England at a later date the stories of King Arthur, and of Tristram and Isoult.

13. Primitive Anglo-Saxon Poetry (Oral Transmission). The Anglo-Saxons were without either Christianity or other cultivation of mind. So far as they knew of writing it was but the art of laboriously cutting upon bark a few runic characters. Nevertheless there had been transmitted orally* among them in their continental home a number of legends, songs, or lays of myth and adventure, which they brought to their new abode, and which were chanted by minstrels at their rude banquets and beer-drinkings, or to gatherings in the villages. The Anglo-Saxon "earls" and "thanes" often kept their own *scôp* or minstrel poet, but the general term is *gleeman*. The gleeman was an honoured person who travelled from place

* See Sec. 2.

to place carrying his harp, or gleewood, with which he accompanied his "fyt,"* adding a certain amount of dramatic action and rhythmic movement of the body. At a later time the best or best-known portions of the gleeman's *répertoire* were put in writing, and it is thus that we know their substance and character. Chief among them are the poem called *Widsith* (the "far-traveller") and the *Legend of Beowulf*. The far-traveller is a gleeman, who has much to say of the prowess and generosity of Gothic and other Germanic chiefs among whom he "roved as his fate willed," and to whom he "unlocked his word-hoard." The poem concerning Beowulf has its scene among Goths (of Southern Sweden) and Danes. Beowulf is a mighty hero, a sort of Hercules, who in his prime slays a dreadful monster of the fens called Grendel, and in his old age grapples with a huge fire-breathing dragon, the guardian of a vast treasure. In this contest both Beowulf and the dragon meet their death. As is usual in such cases, the successive gleemen gave to this story variations of their own, adding new marvels and exploits, but in language very similar. The various portions of this composition were put together and edited into shape in the north of England some time after the year 700; and, if we find in the document as we now have it traces of Christian influence and knowledge, this is due to the later pious hands through which it passed while being shaped. To us it is of the greatest interest, not only because of its quaint and picturesque simplicity, but because it reveals to us the life and character of the people, with their love of war and the sea, their observation of nature, their absence of gaiety, their strong affection, and at the same time their gross appetite.

* See Sec. 5.

14. Coming of Christianity and Culture. In the year 597 the Roman missionary Augustine began the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity. In Northumbria the work was greatly assisted by cultured missionaries from the church in Ireland, and in less than a century the new religion had everywhere driven out the old. Within the hundred years next following (680-780) England came to contain, for the time, the most distinguished seats of learning in Christian Europe. In the south, at Canterbury and Malmesbury, flourished the great master ALDHELM about the year 700. In the north, a little later, the venerable BAEDA (or BEDE), a man of vast learning and industry, was teaching his disciples at Jarrow; and about the year 770 ALCUIN had made his school at York into a species of university for Western Europe. But the prose and poetry of these cultivated Christians showed no narrowness or bigotry towards the creations of their pagan forefathers. It is true that henceforward there is much serious writing, the prose being in Latin (as, for example, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*), but the poetry in native English. Nevertheless, *Widsith* or *Beowulf* might still be repeated by gleemen and copied out by Christian hands. In the style of versification (of which more will be said immediately) the new Christian poetry made no change.

15. Poetry of the Christianised North. About the year 675 a certain CAEDMON was associated in some unknown capacity with the monastery of Whitby. Of him Bede tells us this story. Ashamed that at the festive gathering in the hall he could not sing to the harp in his turn as others could, he had withdrawn to look after the oxen, and had fallen asleep in their stable. In a vision came to him an angel, to whom he told his case, and who bade him sing to the glory of God the Creation,

or "origin of things." Obeying the voice, he learned all that could be taught him of the Bible, and composed verses on the Creation, on the Exodus, and many other portions of the Scriptures, together with poems on the Judgment, Heaven, Hell, and the Mercy of God. In these writings he paraphrased and enlarged the Biblical account, adding passages of description and moralising. His lead was followed by other Christian versifiers, and portions of their work have easily been ascribed to him. A manuscript containing an Anglo-Saxon *Genesis*, an *Exodus*, and a *Daniel* was found and published some years before Milton's *Paradise Lost* appeared; and it has been thought, though without any proof or necessity, that Milton borrowed from it in his description of the Fall of the Angels and the Fall of Man. The manuscript was once supposed to contain the actual work of Caedmon, but though the *Genesis* may possibly be his, the rest is plainly from the hand of other writers. Nevertheless, the poems, like the *Beowulf*, are of much value to us for what they show of the feelings of the time—religious, warlike, nature-loving, with capacity for tenderness and capacity for revenge. The conversion to Christianity alters the subjects of the Englisc poets, but it does not change certain elements in the Engle temperament.

More modern in spirit than Caedmon, so far as we can judge, was the poet CYNEWULF,* whose date may perhaps be placed about the year 770. In his earlier days, as we learn from himself, he was a wanderer and a minstrel, loving the pleasures of youth, its songs, sports, fights, and feasts; but, converted in his later years by a startling vision of the Cross, he devoted himself to religious themes. We have therefore from him songs expressing the old fondness for adventure, story, and fellowship, and also

* Pronounce C as K.

the *Christ*, a poem of the birth and death of the Redeemer, and also of the second Advent. Besides these, he composed poetical pieces called *Riddles*, in which his fancy plays sympathetically with men, animals, and scenes. Particularly remarkable for the time are his fond and lively descriptions of nature by sea and land.

16. Transference of Literature to the South: Growth of English Prose. Just before the year 800 there began the raids of the pirate vikings, commonly known as the "Danes," who ran their long ships out of the Danish and Norwegian sounds and fiords and harried the coasts of Great Britain. From marauders they became, about the year 860, systematic invaders, with a resolve to establish permanent settlements, and this they achieved in Northumbria, and in East and Central Anglia. These terrible newcomers were still pagans, and before their onsets the quiet and learning of northern England vanished, and therewith all literary production. In the south their progress was eventually checked by the West Saxons or men of Wessex, under one of the greatest Englishmen of all time, King ALFRED (871-901).

From this time onward till the Norman conquest it is southern England which produces such literature as we possess. Moreover, it is in the dialect of the West Saxons, and not in the dialect of the north, that have been preserved the works already mentioned as Northumbrian, the fact being that they were, so to speak, translated or re-cast into southern English for the use of the inhabitants of that part, when the northern culture was destroyed by the Danes. This therefore is the language which is learned by those who now study "Anglo-Saxon." As soon as Alfred had made his kingdom safe from the Northmen, he devoted himself to the advancement of knowledge and culture throughout its monasteries and

their schools, as well as in his own court at Winchester, gathering to his help learned men from abroad, encouraging the reading of literature in both Latin and English, and translating various works, either by himself or with the assistance of greater scholars. He was, however, no mere translator, but inserted words and thoughts, or explanations and comments, or re-shaped the order when it so pleased him. It is with justice that he is called the "father of English prose." From his time also dates the keeping of the *English Chronicle*, or *Annals*. Poetry meanwhile did not flourish greatly in the south. Nevertheless, included in the *Annals* at a later day we find two battle-poems, the *Song of Brunanburh* (fought in 937) and the *Battle of Maldon* (in 991). Both of these tell in a spirited fashion of conflicts with the Danes, and the former possesses very high merit in its description of "the clash of banners, the meeting of spears, and the gathering of men."

17. Form of Anglo-Saxon Poetry. The poetry of England before the Conquest, it has been seen, consists in the main of the pagan epic of *Beowulf*, brought orally to England and only reduced to writing at a later date; the Christian poetry of Caedmon and Cynewulf, and the more miscellaneous compositions of the latter; and the war-songs incorporated in the *Chronicle*. Despite all the differences between these compositions, they agree in preserving the old Teutonic system of versification. In a verse there is no rhyme, nor any fixed and invariable number of unaccented syllables. Its basis is alliteration (*i.e.*, repetition of the same letter), combined with accent or stress. The rule of a verse is that it shall consist of two parts: that in the first part shall be two accented syllables, each beginning with the same letter, or else each beginning with a vowel; and that in the second part

there shall be at least another accented syllable beginning in the same way. This system by no means perished at the Norman Conquest, but remained still in use in popular verse as late as the age of Chaucer. Accordingly, inasmuch as Anglo-Saxon has to all intents and purposes now become unintelligible, we may better illustrate the method from its reappearance in the poem of Langland (1363).*

> And as I *l*áy and *l*éned· and *l*óked in the waters

or—

> *C*áme down from a *c*ástel· and *c*alled me faire.

There is, however, a good deal of room for the poet, when he has accepted these rules, to vary the flow of his line, the number of his syllables, and the further amount of alliteration. Monotonous as such verse must seem at first sight, it is found that the effect improves when we are familiar with a proper method of reading it naturally and in quantities.

It should also be noticed that, apart from rhyme, accent still plays the chief part in our English verse, and that our greatest poets have always shown a fondness for alliteration, although they may commonly disguise its use with more art. When Shakespeare writes—

> *F*ull *m*any a *g*lorious *m*orning have I *s*een
> *F*latter the *m*oun*t*ain-*t*ops with *s*overeign eye,

he is incomparably more subtle and effective in his use of the device, but the device itself is a welcome inheritance from our Anglo-Saxon forefathers.

18. Summary of Anglo-Saxon (Pre-Conquest) Literature (A.D. 500-1066):—

A.D. 449-580. Settlement of Anglo-Saxons in Britain. Continental "Englisc" literature brought over in *Widsith* and *Beowulf.*

* See Sec. 29.

A.D. 507. Augustine brings Christianity.
675. CAEDMON'S Paraphrases (*Genesis*, etc.).
730. BAEDA at Jarrow.
[Shaping and editing of *Beowulf*.]
770. Alcuin makes York a seat of learning.
CYNEWULF'S poems (*Riddles*, *Christ*).
} Northumbrian Period.
793. Beginning of Viking raids; destruction of Northern culture.
871-901. ALFRED: "father of English prose."
[*English Chronicle* begins.]
After 937. *Battle of Brunanburh.*
After 991. *Battle of Maldon.*
} Southern Period.

CHAPTER III

FROM THE CONQUEST TO CHAUCER (A.D. 1066-1340)

19. First Retarding Effect of the Conquest. The course of English life and thought, and the history of English language and style, were turned into a new channel by the Norman Conquest; nevertheless nine-tenths of the people were English still, nine-tenths of them continued to speak English, to feel English sentiments, to reason with an English brain. The more elegant and vivacious Norman-French manner and spirit gradually moulded the English material into a new shape; none the less the material was essentially the same. As Lowell has put it, the result was the working of a Norman yeast on a Saxon * home-baked loaf. It is clear, therefore, that no absolutely rigid line can be drawn between the literature of Anglo-Saxons before the Conquest and the literature of the "English" after the Conquest. Nevertheless the future course of English life and literature was greatly modified at the Conquest. One immediate result of that event was to check any literary production in the English language. For about a hundred and fifty years there is scarcely an effort. For the greater part of three hundred years we are met in England by a literature which is not yet in a standard "English," but in Latin, French, or an English which was only struggling towards recognition and towards

* But we are to remember that "Saxon" must here be taken in a wide sense for Anglo-Saxon and its Danish admixture.

some standard of ease and refinement. We cannot say exactly when this old and unsettled English began to be English in our sense. If we place a heap of corn upon a delicate balance and remove the grains one by one, the time comes at last when the lifting of but a solitary grain turns the scale, although the bulk of that grain is itself almost imperceptible. It is so with the change in our language. In Chaucer (1340-1400) we at length recognise a quaint old stage of our own English, whereas in Layamon's *Brut* (1205) we seem to be hearing an unintelligible dialect. Yet Chaucer did not make English.

20. French, Latin, and Despised English. For nearly three centuries, then, literary efforts in England were made in Latin, in French, and in this antiquated English. It is only gradually that the substance of the English nation is found breaking through the Norman veneer. The reasons for this are easy to perceive. First consider the positions of the conquerors and conquered. The Normans were the oppressors, the "Saxons" the oppressed; the Normans enjoyed offices and ease and wealth, the "Saxons" were ground down with labour and poverty; the Normans were the cultivated, whether in court or church, the "Saxons" were the illiterate and the boors. The language of culture, society, and wealth was French; the language of learning was Latin. But the language of the great body of the English people, besides being neither learned nor fashionable, was not even a single tongue: it consisted of a number of dialects, of which none had established itself as the medium of literature. Yorkshire did not speak as Middlesex, nor Somerset as Norfolk. Any beginnings of a popular English literature after the Conquest would have to be local and dialectal. English was discouraged among the higher and middle grades even of "Saxon" society. It was so even in the reign of Edward III., when "Gentilmen

children beeth taught to speke Frensche from the time that they beeth rocked in here cradell . . . and uplondische men will likne hemself to gentilmen, and fondeth with greet besynesse for to speke Frensche to be told of."

21. The Triumph of English. But this state of things could not continue. Nine-tenths of a nation must in the end absorb the other tenth rather than be absorbed by it. The constant wars of England with France created even in the nobles a national spirit, an English, if not a purely Anglo-Saxon, spirit. They were brought nearer to their fellow-citizens. Generation after generation of Norman children were thrown more and more into contact with the children of Anglo-Saxons. There were intermarriages. The noble found it desirable to converse with his dependants in their own tongue. The true English on their side picked up many a Norman word from the noble and his servants, from the priest and the friar, the lawyer and the doctor; they aped Norman pronunciation. Meanwhile they were gaining more freedom, opportunity, and position. English speech became heard in society and the court. And thus the peoples and the languages drew near each other; they amalgamated gradually and solidly. By about the year 1300 English was the current speech even among the higher classes. In 1362 it became the language of the law-courts, and its triumph was complete.

22. Uses of Latin and French Writing. Yet, before this consummation, men of England had been constrained to express themselves in some sort of language concerning history or legend, religion, morals, love, and adventure. If they were learned men and wrote for the learned, they composed in Latin. If they were men of wit and talent and wrote to entertain persons of social cultivation, they wrote in French. Sometimes the same book appeared in both Latin and French. With a court which was for over

two centuries wholly French, and in a feudal society where French was spoken at table and in hall, every aspiring author who sought ready distinction and pay would write in French. Similarly, of the scholars and ecclesiastics who wrote in Latin on English ground, either for writing's sake or for scholastic eminence, some were Normans born in England, others were "Saxons." In Latin would be written the treatises on religion, sacred legends, philosophy, and history. But for the entertainment of the baron's festive company in French, the subject matter will be tales of gallant feats and stories of romance. The prime enthusiasm of the feudal chief was for military glory; he was a man of the crusade and the tournament. His prime diversion was love, in which he displayed a rough, but not seldom tender, gallantry. In his magnificent castle he eats and drinks after the day's fight or hunt. The minstrel—whom he calls "harpour" or "disour,"* but whom the Saxons call "gleeman" or "segger"—comes forward to tell of doughty deeds of arms and faithful service to the chosen fair.

23. Literature of Norman England written in Latin. The Latin writing by scholars and churchmen hardly concerns us. It is in any case mostly dull work, and often as far from truth as from liveliness. The exceptions are histories. Sixty years after the Conquest, William of Malmesbury writes in fair style and with judgment records of the early kings of England. In 1132 GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH compiles with zest a romantic so-called *History of the Britons.* Him we have to thank for the first formulation, or first instalment, of those legends of King Arthur which have since played such a conspicuous part. The Celtic Britons, who had been driven into the west, were now passing back to the Teutons the stories which they had carried with them,†

* Old French for a "teller (of stories)." *Segger* means the same.

† See Sec. 12 (end).

and which their compilers in Wales had since enlarged. It matters nothing if contemporary historians declared that Geoffrey was but inventing when he pretended to be relying upon records. His stories concerning Sabrina, Gorboduc, King Lear, and King Arthur were destined to grow into some of the most important works in our imaginative literature. Within twenty years his *History of the Britons* was converted, with some additions, into French verse by Wace (*Brut d'Engleterre*), and this again was enlarged into the first poem in English, the *Brut* of Layamon (1205).

24. Literature of Norman England written in French. The productions in French, due to the poets called *trouvères*,* are more varied and of more importance. It must never be forgotten by the student that during this period England was only a portion of the King of England's dominions. The rest was in France. Under Henry II. more than half of modern France, to north and west, was part of an English or Franco-English empire. The intercourse between the two divisions was intimate and regular. The writers and minstrels were in a considerable measure common to both. Hence, since this fact made all the difference to the themes and style of a great writer like Chaucer, and had other far-reaching results in England, we must glance briefly at the nature of this French literature which had so great a vogue among us for two hundred years.

The literature of northern France consisted of (1) epic romances of heroic adventure,† (2) allegories,‡ satirical or romantic, (3) tales of common life.§ Of these the first, the epic romances, deal with three main "cycles" (or rounded series) of subjects, viz., with Charlemagne and his paladins, with King Arthur and his knights (together with the once independent legends of Tristram), and with classical heroes

* *i.e.*, "finders."
† Called *chansons de gestes*, and *romans*.
‡ Called also *romans*.
§ Called *fabliaux*.

(whether of Troy or connected with Alexander). These three cycles have been named the "Carlovingian" (or "French,") the "Arthurian" (or "British,") and the "classical" (or "Grecian"). There are thus songs of Roland and Oliver, of Tristram or Launcelot, of Alexander the Great, and many more. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries are rich in poetical narratives which tell of heroic feats, of miracles of devotion and loyalty, mixed with a good deal of the supernatural. This was the day of the Crusades, of conquests of the Saracens, single combats, adventures in distant lands where dwarfs and enchanters, dragons and giants, were supposed to dwell; and nothing pleased the venturous barons more than to be told such tales to the music of the wandering "jongleurs." In the second place the allegorical* poems, long and tedious as they are to us, were very popular. The most famous of all was the *Romance of the Rose*, which contained a satirical miscellany of learning and legend. It is all about a lover who sought to pluck a rose, about his difficulties in reaching it, about the abstract qualities which help or hinder him; about personified virtues and vices, such as Dame Idleness, who lets him into the garden, Avarice, Meanness, Hatred, who stand in his way, Fair-Seeming, who has much to say in the matter, and numerous others. Thanks to these agencies, it takes that unhappy youth some 23,000 verses† before he attains to plucking the object of his affection. To the same class of writing belongs the satirical beast fable of *Reynard the Fox*, which had an immense vogue. In the third place, the amusing tale of common life lets us know that the world of the time was not wholly made of doughty knights and gentle damosels. It will be seen later that these classes of literature greatly influenced

* An allegory is a form of composition in which, while one thing is said, another meaning is to be gathered from under it.

† *i.e.*, lines.

Chaucer, as well as his smaller predecessors and contemporaries. And it is to be understood that these were as much the current reading (or rather hearing) of the cultivated classes in England as in France.

25. Poetry written in English. Of English writing itself there was in all this period, except for a few tales and moral pieces, little but poetry. The first important effort is that of LAYAMON, who in 1205 issued his *Brut*, in some 30,000 lines, written in a somewhat fresh form of the Anglo-Saxon verse which has been described.* Its chief device is therefore alliteration and accent. But since the verse of the French romances depended instead on rhyme and the number of syllables, and since English readers or hearers of the French verses had become accustomed to this habit, Layamon also occasionally introduces the new feature of rhyme. His work is uncritical and diffuse, but frequently vigorous and pathetic; and it is important for its amplifications of the work of Wace (from which it is mainly borrowed †), and for the development for the first time of the "Table Round" of the Arthurian romance. Next we have a representative of the "home-baked Saxon loaf" *not* lightened by the French "yeast," in the shape of the *Ormulum* of a Cheshire priest called ORM (1215). This is but a metrical and expanded arrangement of gospels and sermons. As a specimen of the English of the day we may quote the author's own explanation of the title, namely:

þiss ‡ boc is nemmned Orrmulum for þi þat
Orrm itt wrohhtë: §

i.e., This book is named Ormulum because
that Orm it wrought.

* See Sec. 17. † See Sec. 23.

‡ þ is the Anglo-Saxon letter for *th*. Hence þe=the, afterwards miswritten *ye*.

§ Pronounce the *h* like Scotch *ch* in lo*ch*, or the German *ch*.

The only other native poetry worthy of mention before Chaucer is (1) a Dorsetshire lyric called *The Owl and the Nightingale* (about 1220), in which the two birds set up their rival claims with much pleasant discursiveness; (2) a number of simple and frank popular ballads (as for instance concerning Robin Hood) of unknown authorship, full of an unpretended joy in outdoor air.

But to this we must add the fact that, as the native English folk pressed more to the fore and demanded greater recognition—or, in other words, made it worth the minstrel's while—large numbers of the French romances and allegories were worked over into an English shape for the entertainment of those who "had no French." The "segger" or minstrel—who had now virtually become a combination of superior street-singer and more or less skilful juggler *—might be found in the latter part of the thirteenth century diffusing free renderings of Roland and Oliver, Amis and Amiles, and the like, throughout the country. According to Chaucer, the story of Alexander was known to "every wight that hath discrecioun." The phrases still current, "a Roland for an Oliver," and the much perverted "a miss is as good as a mile,"† afford some token of the vogue long ago enjoyed by these productions. In the *Cursor Mundi*, a moral and religious poem written in English about the year 1320, the minstrels sing as follows ‡:—

> "Men lyken gestës for to hear,
> And romans read in divers manére,
> Of Alexandre the conqueroúre,
> Of Julius Caesar the emperoúre,
> Of Greece and Troy the strongë stryf,
> There many a man lost his lyf . . .

* The word is actually the same as *jongleur*, *i.e.*, "minstrel."

† Amis and Amiles were men precisely alike.

‡ The spelling is here much modernised.

> Of King Arthur, that was so riche,
> Was not in his tyme him liche ("like") . . .
> Of Tristrem and Ysoude the swete,
> How they with love first gan mete . . .
> Stories of diverse thinges,
> Of princes, prelates, and kinges,
> Many songs of divers rhime,
> As Engelish, French, and Latyne."

Very few romances identify themselves with an English home. *Havelok the Dane*, *Guy of Warwick*, and *Bevis of Hampton* * are the chief of these.

26. Summary of Anglo-Norman Literature (A.D. 1066-1340).

A.D. 1066. The Conquest.

1132. GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH (*Historia Britonum*, in Latin).

1154. Union of England and Normandy with Anjou, Poitou, and Aquitaine.
Trouvère literature flourishing in France.

1155. WACE (Anglo-Norman) enlarges Geoffrey in his French *Brut d'Engleterre.*

1205. LAYAMON'S *Brut* in English verse (develops Arthurian Round Table).

1215. ORM'S *Ormulum.*
[Date of Magna Charta.]

(about) 1220. *The Owl and the Nightingale* (English lyric tale).
English ballads.

1260 (onwards). Englishing of French verse romances.

[1321. Dante's *Divine Comedy* appears in Italy at this date.]

* *i.e.*, Southampton.

CHAPTER IV

CHAUCERIAN PERIOD (A.D. 1340-1400)

27. The English Language Established: Chaucerian English. We have now reached the period at which the two races, Norman and English, had become fused, and when a recognised English speech was ready to be employed in literature. French was still spoken at court, in parliament, and largely in baronial halls, convents, and monasteries, but it was rather artificial, and differed considerably from the French of the Continent; Chaucer's Prioress can only talk the French "of Stratford-atte-Bowe." Of the various dialects in England, it was natural that the one which prevailed should be that which was spoken around the centre of the national and learned life of the country. This included London and the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, that is, the dialect of the south-eastern Midlands. The same phenomenon has occurred in all countries, as, for example, with the central Tuscan Italian, Parisian French, and Castilian Spanish. Chaucer did not "make" this language; he simply wrote in it because it was the most natural in which to write, but his great example and influence no doubt did much to establish a form of speech which was already establishing itself. As usual when two languages come much into conflict with each other, the collision of French and English had principally had the effect of hastening the rate at which English was, in any case, dropping a number of useless inflexions, genders, and sounds. The language

of Chaucer's time shows an English of much lighter pronunciation than of old, and one which has borrowed a considerable list of words, many of them much needed, from the French. In his own verses he adopts the French methods, which consist of rhyme and a fixed number of syllables, but he combines with these the force of accent. The native English device of alliteration he discards with contempt, calling it "rum, ram, roff." There is a certain amount of vacillation in the way he and his like accentuate the longer words taken from French, and, both in this respect and in the pronunciation of *e* or *es* at the end of a word, it is necessary for a reader of Chaucer to make some small study, if he desires to read him so that he sounds as metrical and musical as he really is. We must, for instance, treat the following lines thus:

> And as for me, though that I can but lyte,*
> On bokës for to rede I me delyte,
> And to hem give I feyth and full credénce,
> And in myn herte have hem in reverénce
> So hertëly, that there is gamë nōn
> That fro my bokës maketh me to gōn,
> But yt be seldom on the holy day;
> Save, certeynly, whan that the month of May
> Is comen, and that I here the foulës syngë,
> And that the flourës gynnen for to spryngë,
> Farewell my boke and my dyvocioun.†

28. English Life in Chaucer's Day. Before we come to the work of Chaucer and his contemporaries, it is desirable to observe briefly the sort of England in which it was written. In a population which had been reduced by frequent visitations of the plague from about five millions to two and a half millions, there were no towns of more than 12,000 inhabitants, and London itself had scarcely

* *i.e.*, "know but little." † Pronounce de-vó-she-óon.

40,000. Even in the capital, amid all its artistic Gothic buildings and sumptuous shows of court and merchants' homes, the streets were narrow, ill-paved and unscavenged, and pigs ran about them at their pleasure. In the country the huge and heavy castles of the nobles, which were less useful since artillery had been invented, were giving way to the "moated grange." From town to town ran rough and muddy roads, haunted by outlaws, thieves called "wastors" or "Robert's men," and sturdy beggars, who could easily find shelter in the numerous woods and waste places. Travellers therefore preferred to journey in company, and to go armed. Those who could afford it travelled on horseback, both men and women riding astride. The more luxurious made slow progress in gorgeous travelling-coaches, which were large silk-lined arks, or shaped like a sort of tunnel on wheels. If we were making such a journey we should note many sorts and conditions of men.

On either side of the road, tilling the fields with wooden ploughs drawn by oxen, there would be poor labourers, some free, some "villeins" who could not desert their patch of ground without becoming outlaws. Passing along on fine horses would be grave and prosperous merchants, "with forkèd beards," on their way to places where wool could be purchased, to fairs, and to ports whither their cargoes were due from Flanders, France, or Venice. We should meet Justices going in state with their retinues to the quarterly assizes, "Knights of the Shire" bound to or from the Parliament in London, "King's messengers," enjoying a right to take all manner of short cuts, and hawking parties of knights and ladies, or of abbots and monks, with jingling bells upon their bridles. Especially frequent on the roads would be friars, pardoners, and pilgrims. Of these the mendicant friars, licensed to beg

within a certain district, and thence called "limitours," were in special ill-repute, as we find in Chaucer, Langland, and all writers of the time. Not only did they interfere with the duties of the parish priest (often a most self-sacrificing and pious man) and intercept his offertories, but the lower portion of them peddled small articles to ignorant folk, and sang ballads in the ale-houses. Some, however, were earnest and philanthropic men, sympathising with the sorrows of the very poor. The "pardoners," bearing a small cross and wearing a vernicle (a copy of the traditional portrait of Christ) on their hat, carried a wallet full of "pardons," many of which had no authority whatever from Rome. The poorer "pilgrims" begged their way along, or were supported by the contributions of a guild, or Pilgrims' Union, as they made their way to Canterbury or Walsingham, or over the sea to the shrines at Boulogne, at Cologne, at Compostella in Spain, or to Rome, or to Jerusalem. Those returning bore a badge to show the place which they had reached—a palm leaf from Jerusalem, a cockle shell from Compostella, and a vernicle from Rome. Many of these were mere idlers, rather tramps than pilgrims. Hermits established themselves at convenient spots, such as near bridges, and almost exacted a due from the passer-by. Poor university students, armed with a letter from the Chancellor, begged in the vacations for money wherewith "to scholeye." Minstrels or gleemen, carrying guitars, tambourines, and other instruments, took their stock of ballads and of juggling tricks to villages and fairs, and with them went many pedlars with their packs. The doctor, with his small store of unscientific medical astrology and alchemy, was to be seen with his gold-headed stick. When we passed a cabin from which projected a pole with a "bush" upon it, we should recognise an "ale-house." If we wished to rest for the night we might do so in an inn,

which was also marked by its "ale-stake." There we might perhaps eat a fat hen or a dozen eggs for a "penny"; but we should find the bedrooms anything but clean. Persons of rank would seek some neighbouring castle or manor. If no inn were in sight we might be taken in at a monastery, and even the poorest traveller could hope for shelter in the *maison-dieu* of those institutions. If we lodged in the house of a baron or a knight we should dine in the rush-strewn hall—the gentry on the dais, the servants lower down, and the banquet would be enlivened by minstrelsy.

The age was one of much sumptuousness and pageantry, of embroidery and colour, but withal of much that was uncomfortable and insanitary. The great victories of Edward III. had but exhausted the resources of England by excessive taxes, and there was abroad a spirit of discontent, which culminated in the Peasants' Rebellion of Wat Tyler. Plague after plague, "the foul death of England," occurred during Chaucer's lifetime. Religion was at a low ebb. Education was hardly possessed by anyone among the poor, and these could mostly neither read nor write. The upper classes could read and write in English, often in French, sometimes in Latin or Italian; but science there was none, and when the contemporaries of Chaucer talked of the ancient world, they saw it in the light of their own social system, dress, manners, and ideas. In behaviour the age was very coarse, particularly in oath and jest, but a "parfit gentil knight" was not seldom to be found, and Chaucer himself reveals the kindly nobility and genial humour which often underlay much exterior vulgarity.

29. Writers contemporary with Chaucer. Though Chaucer is immeasurably the greatest writer of this age, a word must be said about three or four of his contemporaries.

John GOWER (for notice now that men regularly possess both a surname and a Christian name) was ten years older than Chaucer, whom he liked to imagine as his "disciple." To him, as "the moral Gower," Chaucer dedicated his *Troilus and Cressida.* Some parts of his work were composed in Latin, some in French, and the *Lover's Confession* in English (for the use of which he apologises). The last (1390) is of the usual kind for the day, including stories, which Gower has borrowed from France or Italy, illustrating the harms which the seven deadly sins do to a lover. The work altogether lacks the vivacity and vigour of Chaucer.

William LANGLAND, a Shropshire man, who became a London and country priest of the humbler order, is of more importance, since he deals at first hand with realities. His *Vision of William Concerning Piers Plowman* is an allegory attacking, though in a just and philanthropic spirit, the worldliness of his day, its oppressions, vanity, greed, and hypocrisy. For the purposes of this social satire he chooses as representative of the simple, wholesome, and honest type a certain ploughman, or peasant farmer, who knows that every man has his duty, and that society should make every man perform it. The language, being addressed to the common people, has a more countrified air, and is harder for us to read than that of Chaucer (which is primarily for a higher circle of readers), and the verse is not rhymed, but is written according to the alliterative and accentual rules of Anglo-Saxon verse.* Thus it begins—

> In a *s*omer *s*eson · when *s*oft was the *s*onne,
> I *sh*ope me in *sh*roudes · as I a *sh*epe were.†

* See Sec. 17.

† *i.e.*, "I prepared myself in garments as if I were a shepherd."

Langland constantly enlarged his work between its first appearance in 1363 and its final form in 1398. He added another composition with the same moral, called *Do Well, Do Bet* (*i.e.*, better), *Do Best*. *Piers Plowman* was at this age the people's poem in a far greater degree than the writings of Chaucer; for the people, feeling bitterly the effects of class oppression and religious corruption, were deeply interested in the vision of the pomps, sins, greed, and goodness which the writer pretended to see from Malvern hills. In those days the "dream" or "vision" (as in the *Romance of the Rose*) was the vogue. Under it you could attack the most real abuses, while innocently pretending that it was, of course, "all a dream." The tall lean taciturn churchman, known in London as Long Will, possessed a knowledge and a grim humour which deftly touched off the life around him in "that field full of folk" which was the world of England.

In Scotland meanwhile (1375) John BARBOUR, of Aberdeen, composed in "Inglis" (or English with a Scottish tinge) his spirited rhyming couplets of *The Brus* (*i.e.*, the story of Robert Bruce). Of the same period, English prose is represented by two very different works: the one is the translation of the Bible by John WYCLIF, the other is the English version of (the so-called) *Sir John Maundevile's Travels*. Wyclif was a man of culture and learning, who was led from disputes concerning the right government of the church to a more special consideration of the Scriptures, and thence to a rendering of them (with the assistance of others) into plain and artless English. Beyond this he does not here concern us as a purely literary figure. The *Travels*, attributed to a certain Sir John Maundevile of St. Albans, are an excellent and entertaining example of the easy but unsophisticated English prose writing of the time; but who Sir John was,

or whether he ever existed, is a matter of the utmost uncertainty. The writer pretends to have travelled to Jerusalem, to the palace of "the great Cham" in China, and elsewhere; but his amazing marvels are manifestly drawn not from his observation, but from a farrago of previous books, from the Latin Pliny and the Italian Marco Polo, and various current tales and legends. The work appeared about A.D. 1400, and is now commonly supposed to have been written originally in French by a certain John of Burgundy, resident at Liège, in Belgium.

30. GEOFFREY * CHAUCER was the son of a merchant vintner of London. The merchant vintners were men of means and repute, and Chaucer's father was in a position to give his son the most liberal of educations, and also to gain his admission to the highest society by entering him as a page of the Court. Chaucer was born in 1340, and died in 1400. Of his early years we know nothing for certain. From some indications, which are much too slight for the purpose, it has been argued that Chaucer received education at Cambridge. Be that so or not, he was educated, and liberally educated, in Latin, French, and Italian, as well as in contemporary science, which, by the way, was shallow and empirical enough. Throughout his life he remained devoted to books.† In 1357 we find him a Court page in the household of Prince Lionel. Two years later he served as a soldier in a disastrous war in France, was made prisoner, and was ransomed by the English king, Edward III. There were at this time three degrees in chivalry: those of the page, the esquire, and the knight. In 1374 Chaucer is called esquire, but he never rose to the rank of knighthood. We find him at different

* When Spenser calls him "Dan Chaucer," the word Dan = Latin *dominus* (like the Spanish Don), and means "Master."

† See the passage quoted in Sec. 27.

periods of his life holding various salaries and offices, for which he seems to have been chiefly indebted to the patronage of the celebrated John of Gaunt, son of Edward III. In 1372 he went, as one of a commission of three, to treat with the Doge and merchants of Genoa concerning questions of commercial relationship between the two states; and on that occasion he visited Florence, the city of Dante and Boccaccio and the centre of culture at the time. We like to imagine, and it is not improbable, that he also met the famous poet "Fraunceys Petrark" in the not very remote town of Padua. Two years later (1374) he was appointed Comptroller of the customs of wools, skins, and hides in the port of London, and to the duties of that office he was compelled, until eleven years later, to attend in person. This appointment reminds us of the excisemanship which was in later days given to Burns, and the collectorship of stamps bestowed on Wordsworth. And here one might remark that those who are so eager to find genius impracticable, unstable, and slightly demented, must look somewhere else than to our great English poets for proofs of that remarkable and self-complacent theory. In 1378 Chaucer was sent once more to Italy in an embassy to Milan. On this occasion he no doubt improved his acquaintance with Italian learning. In 1386 he sat in Parliament for Kent. In the following year he seems to have fallen into disfavour for some unknown reason, and to have been deprived of his office of Comptroller of customs. Shortly afterwards, however, he was invested with another, that of clerk of works to various royal palaces and manors. This again was soon lost, and for the last few years of his life he appears to have lived in some straits upon a royal pension, putting together new portions of the most immortal of his works, the *Canterbury Tales.*

Such are the chief facts of the life of the "father of English poetry." For his appearance, we have a portrait painted on the margin of a book by the later poet, Chaucer's disciple, Occleve (or Hoccleve)—the portrait of a quiet, thoughtful, slily humorous and observant man, capable of entering into the enjoyments of life, but not likely to waste himself upon them.

Chaucer held unquestioningly the Catholic religion of his day; nevertheless his characters in the *Canterbury Tales* include a Monk, a Friar, a Summoner, a Pardoner, of whom he speaks with a freedom of satire quite equal to the denunciation of Wyclif. On the other hand, his beautiful and loving description of the "Poore Parson of a Town" shows that he looked at the religious questions of his time very much as Wyclif looked at them when he established his order of Simple Priests. It is true that Chaucer had no sympathy with "lollardry" in its ruder or narrower forms; but it is no less true that he saw clearly the immoral and venal character of the monks and friars who were thick as flies in the England of his day. There were numbers of honest, laborious, pious parish priests, like Chaucer's Poore Parson of a Town; and Chaucer is merely uttering the spirit of his times when he gives all his regard and sympathy to the humble secular clergy, and keeps all his satire, and little but satire, for the more haughty or more dissolute misusers of ecclesiastical titles.

31. Chaucer's Three Stages. We have now sketched a brief outline of Chaucer's life, after giving some account of the social conditions of the age. Under such conditions Chaucer produced much poetry of various quality, and some prose, which is of little moment.

We may observe three periods or stages in his works, Chaucer's being one of those sound minds which steadily

mature with reading and observation. The three periods are these: the period of French influence; the period of Italian influence; and the period of maturity or self-reliance. Chaucer is "original" only in virtue of what he did with his borrowings. He is, like Shakespeare, no independent creator of mere plots and stories. He was also gradual in feeling his feet. During two stages, brilliant as they are, he is therefore still learning. It is in the third, the period of the *Canterbury Tales*, that he finds his true powers and exercises them. His obligations to French and Italian writers lie both in his matter and his manner, his substance and his form: for Chaucer began, as all clever men begin, by imitation of prevailing forms and models.

32. French Influence on Chaucer. A great poem of the time, and for many a day after, was the famous French *Romance of the Rose*, already mentioned.* This poem Chaucer translated. We cannot indeed be sure—the case is rather the contrary—that the large fragment which bears his name is actually his, although some of it is probably authentic. A work of the same sort, and of equal doubt as to its authenticity, is the *Court of Love*, another love-allegory in rhyme and with the orthodox machinery, including a garden, many fair ladies, the god of love, and much languishing sentimentality. We cannot dwell upon this piece, but it is desirable to mention that in it appears the daisy as the conventional emblem of womanhood. The daisy is for ever appearing in Chaucer, and those who read only Chaucer are apt to extol the poet for his peculiar love of this simple flower. But, as a matter of fact, French poets had long and habitually made use of the daisy in such connections. "Daisy" in French is *marguerite*, and a whole class of dainty poems

*Sec. 24.

have been called "Marguerites." Also in the same poem we have the birds on a May morning breaking into matins, and the nightingale, eagle, popinjay, and goldfinch singing their *Venite Exultemus Domino*, or their *Te Deum*, in a temple of hawthorn. And that too is part of fashion. Up and down the early Chaucer, as up and down the poets of his time, we shall find men waking on a morning—which is always a May morning—to hear the birds singing blithely, and see the flowers springing freshly. And this too is conventional and a tradition—a tradition not to be lamented, but a tradition none the less. *The Boke of the Duchesse* (another dream) is an undoubted work of Chaucer in his "romantic" stage.

During this period of his growth Chaucer acts just as the French poets act, and as do the poets of Provence. He writes of love according to a system. It is not so much a passion as a science, in which it behoves any poet to show that he understands the orthodox code of behaviour. He must understand deportment, and he must surround all his figures with appropriate settings, which are rose-gardens and delicious arbours. He must place them among knights and ladies sumptuously arrayed, and amid many garlands and feastings and sound of ringing trumpets. It was precisely such things as these which in actual life pleased the childlike minds of contemporary England or Normandy.

33. Chaucer's Italian Period. Chaucer's second period is stronger than his first. In this stage he is under the influence of the deep-thinking Dante, of the critical and polished Petrarch, of the graceful Boccaccio. He cares less for the romances of the French. His *Troilus and Cressida* is an enlarged version of a story of Boccaccio made more pathetic and more moral. The *House of Fame*

is evidently in its structure taken from Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and is full of suggestions from Petrarch, and, further back, from many classical sources.

In this period we get other poems of love—the *Complaint to Pity*, *Complaint of Mars*, *Complaint of Venus*—all built on the same plan, and full of artificial sentiment. A greater work is the *Assembly of Fowls* or *Parliament of Birds*, where, in the usual garden of love, are the usual allegorical array of characters. Over the gate is an inscription, borrowed from Dante's inscription over the gate of Hell, and the persons inside are described in sixteen stanzas directly translated from Boccaccio. The birds make speeches concerning the proper partner for the female eagle, and much humour and descriptive power are shown. The whole conception is represented as a dream, and here again we have one of the fashionable conventions of the period. The dream is the form, the May morn is the time, a garden is the scene.

This second period produces richer, more real and touching poems than the first. But still his greatest work remains to be performed.

34. Chaucer's Maturity. The fame of Chaucer is chiefly due to the *Canterbury Tales.* It tells how twenty-nine pilgrims gather together at the Tabard Inn in Southwark; how they set forth on their pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas at Canterbury; how Harry Baily, their host of the Tabard, is their ruling spirit; how it is agreed that each shall tell two stories on the outward way and two on the return; and how the victor in story-telling shall receive the prize of a supper in his honour. By the device of a pilgrimage he brings together all sorts and conditions of men of contemporary England. Perfect are the descriptions of the characters who appear in that motley gathering—the Knight, the Squire, the Yeoman,

the Prioress, the Nuns, the Priests, the Monk, the Mendicant Friar, the Student, the Merchant, the Serjeant of Law, the Franklin, the Weaver, Dyer, Carpenter, Cook, Shipman, Miller, Ploughman, the Poore Parson, the Pardoner, the Summoner, the Alchemist, the Doctor of Physic, the Reeve, the Manciple, and the Wife of Bath. By these only twenty-four stories are told; for Chaucer died, or tired, before he could write the rest.

Nothing has ever been done in any literature more perfectly than the descriptions of these various personages in Chaucer's *Prologue*. As each is called, he stands forward from the page as in a picture. We see him almost in the flesh. Such truth of drawing in a few touches has never been surpassed. And then remark what scope for his faculty the author has given himself in all this list: scope for humour, wit, pathos, social satire, and criticism. See how genuine wit and keen good sense can be united to liberal-mindedness, to *bonhomie* and tolerance, and often to moving tenderness. You see the great forerunner of Shakespeare, the man who can perceive foibles, and gently deride them without irritation and savageness; who can look out on the world of men as it is, and paint it as it is, without making himself out to be much better than his neighbours; who may be sarcastic and ironical, but who "never sneers." You see also a modest poet, one who hides his own personality, or, if he expresses it, makes no parade of any greater virtue than a love of books and an admiration of poets greater than himself:

> And I come after, gleaning here and there,
> And am full glad if I can find an ear
> Of any goodly word that ye have left.

Finally, no one who can overcome the initial difficulty of his diction can fail to note how felicitously direct and

simple, and how harmoniously sweet, is the language in which he tells his tales.

35. Qualities of Chaucer. It is hard to sum up the individual excellences of Chaucer. His sly humour, his liberal-mindedness, his keenness of observation, his power of realistic drawing, his skill in telling a story, his sweet and musical verse—all these are his own, and no fashion could impart them. That he is a "perpetual fountain of good sense" has been said by Dryden; that he suggests for ever the perpetual fresh air of a spring morning, or the smell of new-mown hay, is the universal opinion of his later readers. These are the proofs of individual genius.

But for the rest he was the creature of his time. You will look in vain in Chaucer for deep ponderings on social or religious problems, for self-analysis, or for criticism. You will look in vain for moral and social delicacy. You will look in vain for originality of mere subject-matter. Chaucer lays all previous literature under contribution. On the other hand, you will find sundry shortcomings. You will find much ignorance, and strange mixtures of things mediæval with things scriptural and antique, combined with a desire to show off knowledge, to give inopportune explanations. But these are the faults of everyone of his time. The Age of Learning has not yet reached England; the age of criticism has not dawned. Chaucer's love of nature, it has been pointed out, is not peculiar to himself. But his love of the spring, with its birds and flowers, is genuine and keen; and when he says of its effects

"Full is my heart of revel and soláce,"

he makes us feel it all with him.

He borrowed matter freely; nevertheless all his material ran into an amalgam in his mind; it became practically

a new substance: he re-created it. And, when he borrowed from French or Italian, his English mind gave a special English quality to all it received. He imparted a sincerity and a gravity where his original was often unreal. He was more honest in his sympathy and pathos than those from whom he took the situations of pathos and sympathy. He was a student, but his "book study did not kill knowledge of the world."

36. Summary of the Chaucerian Period (A.D. 1340-1400):—

A.D. 1340. Birth of Chaucer. French and English equal before the law.

[Petrarch and Boccaccio flourished in Italy. *Decameron* (tales) of Boccaccio 1350.]

1362. English language recognised in law courts.

1363. William LANGLAND'S *Vision of Piers Plowman.*

1366-1372. Chaucer's first period (*Romance of the Rose, Boke of the Duchesse*).

1372-1378. Chaucer in Italy.

1375. John BARBOUR'S *Bruce.*

1380 (about). Wyclif's Bible.

1381. Peasants' Rising (Wat Tyler).

1380-1385. Chief works of Chaucer's second period (*Troilus and Cressida, Parliament of Fowles, House of Fame, Legend of Good Women*).

1385-1389. *Canterbury Tales* (*Prologue* and many of the stories).

1390 (about). John GOWER'S *Lover's Confession.*

1398. Final text of Langland's *Vision.*

1400. Death of Chaucer and of Langland.

English edition of *Maundevile's Travels.*

CHAPTER V

PERIOD AFTER CHAUCER—A.D. 1400-1575

(*a*) THE BARREN AGE (1400-1510)

37. Causes of Barrenness after Chaucer. After Chaucer for a hundred years came barrenness. The fountains of literary inspiration at this time failed, not only in England, but almost everywhere in Europe. No truly "classic" book dates from the fifteenth century. Though the "New Learning" (an expression to be soon explained) was making great advance in Southern Europe, in England there was a stagnation of ideas, due largely to the wretched nature of the unstimulating education then in vogue. In its so-called highest branches, as represented by the "Schoolmen," this consisted in generally adopting certain canons or statements as true, without freshly enquiring whether they were so, and then arguing and hair-splitting as to their so-called logical consequences. Until the "New Learning" forced its way, there was much meaningless and futile "philosophical" quibbling, but little healthy study and direct observation of the varied and wonderful operations of nature, or of the actual workings of the minds and souls of humanity around.

During a part of the period (from 1455) there must have been in England much distraction and disturbance in consequence of the Wars of the Roses, but history shows us that wars do not necessarily interfere very much with literary production. We have, however, to assume also a remarkable dearth of genius. It is true that genius

requires encouragement in fit surroundings; but it is not clear how the times of Chaucer had lent themselves more to literary creation than did the hundred years which followed. But Chaucer had perhaps now given to nearly all the existing material and conceptions the highest literary form of which these admitted, and, since there were no new ideas to express, his followers could only imitate him or put together some little gleanings which the master had left. From Chaucer we seem to step out of fragrant grassy lawns in order to make a journey through an arid land, dotted here and there with some effort or semblance of verdure, until we come upon larger and larger oases, which at last thicken into the glorious landscapes of the later years of Elizabeth's transcendent age.

38. Chaucer's Successors in England. In England the chief aim of literary effort was to imitate Chaucer. Occleve (or Hoccleve) is dull and inconsiderable, but the prolific John LYDGATE, a monk who had studied all the current stock of knowledge in Latin, French, and Italian, and who speaks of "my maister Chaucer, chiefe poete of Bretayne," made more pretensions with his fertile but prolix stories of Troy and Thebes and the *Falls of Princes.* Some of the imitations of Chaucer are anonymous, but are so good of their kind that they have often been credited to the master himself. Of comparatively conspicuous merit is a piece by one unknown author called *The Flower and the Leaf.* Nor did imitation of the great master cease with the following generation. After the introduction of printing into England by Caxton (1476), the works of Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate were among the first to be published in that form, and there ensued among writers an unfortunate attempt to revive the themes and style of the Chaucerian school. As late as 1506 we find Stephen HAWES, fluently Chaucerising (or, to put it more correctly,

improving on Lydgate) in his allegorical *Pastime of Pleasure.* His contemporary, John SKELTON—though later he found courage to follow his own bent in other paths—began by walking in the same footsteps.

39. Other Literature in England. More valuable than this artificial kind of work are the popular ballads, such as the stirring border raid of *Chevy Chase*,* with which Sir Philip Sidney declared that his heart was moved more than with a trumpet; and the story of the *Nut-Brown Maid*, whose boundless loyalty to an apparently humble and outlawed lover is rewarded by the discovery that he is all the time a noble in disguise. The date and origin of these are quite uncertain, but they possess the saving grace of literature, in that they are unaffected, and alive with the "maker's" spontaneous impulse to compose and sing in language simple and direct. After simply mentioning the monumental prose compilation of Sir Thomas Malory, called *Morte D'Arthur*, we must not fail to note the significance of CAXTON in our literature. It is not so much for his own meritorious work in translation, nor that he was an ardent lover of letters as well as being commercially a good judge of books. But the importance of the day, in 1476, when William Caxton issued the first book printed at Westminster, *The Dictes and Notable Wise Sayings of the Philosophers*, can hardly be exaggerated. Printing had come in time, and was destined soon to diffuse rapidly all the wealth of literature of the classical past which was just now being recovered by the modern world.

To a new and un-Chaucerian development belongs the maturer work—such as *Colin Clout* and *Why come ye not to Court?*—of SKELTON, whom we have already mentioned. Being—for a priest, and, according to that excellent authority Erasmus, an "ornament of learning"—a

* A corruption of *chevauchée* (*chevachie* in Chaucer), "a riding out."

truculent person, with much humour and vivacity and a keen pair of eyes, he turned from his misplaced allegory and moralising to matters for which he really cared, attacking Cardinal Wolsey and abuses in the church and society. This he does in short vigorous verses, and with a fearlessness and energy only equalled, unhappily, by his intolerable coarseness. Yet, rude as he is, he at least represents a live mind and heart behind his words.

40. Literature of the Period in Scotland. During the fifteenth century Scotland was productive in both a larger and a better degree than England. The literary language as far north as Aberdeen was as English as in England, or at least was marked only by northern peculiarities of no great account. Prominent are the names of King James (I. of Scotland), William Dunbar, and Gavin Douglas. JAMES I. had been for many years a prisoner in England, and in his *King's Quair** (or book) of 1422 he gives us a series of love verses—inspired in this case by a genuine object of affection—in the style and stanza of Chaucer (henceforward to be known as "rhyme royal"). Many of his lines contain a distinctly touching quality of quaint and courtly tenderness. DUNBAR, who began with Chaucerian allegories, such as *The Thistle and the Rose* (1503), but then turned, like Skelton, to satirical compositions, is best known by his *Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins*, a piece vivified by humour and by touches of horror almost Dantesque. Dunbar is now recognised as having been the most considerable poet in Great Britain for more than a hundred years since Chaucer, and as the greatest Scottish poet until the appearance of Burns. Of this Scottish poetry in general, including the embellishments to Virgil by DOUGLAS, and to Æsop by HENRYSON, it may be said that it surpasses the contemporary English

* Modern English : *quire.*

in direct and native force, in vigorous, if coarse, humour, and in a real and unconventional fondness for wild nature. But it is easy to be led by its comparative merits and its quaintness to set a higher value upon its merits than they absolutely deserve.

41 Summary of the "Barren Age" (A.D. 1400-1510):—

A.D. 1412. (H)OCCLEVE: *Gouvernail of Princes.*
1421-1425. John LYDGATE: *Troy Book, Falls of Princes.*
1422. JAMES I. of Scotland: *King's Quair.*
[Greek learning progressing in Italy.]
[1450 (about). Printing invented.]
1470. Sir Thomas MALORY: *Morte D'Arthur.*
1476. CAXTON at Westminster.
1480. Robert HENRYSON in Scotland: *Æsop.*
1501. Gavin DOUGLAS: *Virgil.*
1506. Stephen HAWES: *Pastime of Pleasure.*
1507. John SKELTON: Satires.
1508. William DUNBAR: *Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins.*
[1509. Accession of Henry VIII.]

CHAPTER VI

PERIOD AFTER CHAUCER—A.D. 1400-1575

(*b*) THE TUDOR REVIVAL (A.D. 1510-1575)

42. The New Learning. During the fifteenth century a great revival in thought and art had been progressing in Italy. Also it had been spreading from that country, and was beginning to invigorate all Western Europe. Among the active-minded cities of Italy a revival of the Roman classics had indeed begun as early as the year 1200. Hence had come the "humanists,"* as they were called, including masters like Dante or Petrarch. Soon the enthusiasm extended to the much more stimulating classics of Greece, and a vigorous quest of manuscripts set in. Next, as Greece was devoured piecemeal by the Turks, Greek learning streamed over to Italy; and when, in 1453, Constantinople at last fell, the influx of Greek scholars, with all their magnificent literature of ancient Greece, stirred the intellectual and artistic life of Italy to its depths. All was eagerness for the recovery of the ancient masterpieces, for Homer, Plato, and Theocritus. The Greeks were ardent to teach, and the Italians to learn. Therefore foreigners, and gradually more and more Englishmen among them, flocked to Bologna, Padua, or Florence, to acquire what was called the "New Learning." We in these days can hardly realise the profound meaning of these novel studies. To us this wealth of literature

* *Humanitas* is the Latin for "culture" on its refining side, and "the humanists" were those who specially sought and encouraged such culture.

and thought, then new, has come down by inheritance. The great thoughts and noble expressions of the Greek and Roman writers now permeate all our literature and all our thinking. But it was not so in the period with which we are dealing. When all those stores of epics, dramas, lyrics, histories, philosophies, and other creations were revealed—so fresh in their thinking, so broad in their interests, so excellent in their style and art—when that clear untrammelled Greek way of looking at things, and that wide view of whole questions, rather than little bits, came home to these eager spirits of Western Europe, they felt as Keats felt when he made acquaintance with Homer through Chapman's translation :

> "Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
> When a new planet swims into his ken."

Thought was freed, the horizon of living interest was enlarged, the age of curiosity, speculation, and discovery set in with full tide. Men let their imaginations run loose. Their mind's eye saw unknown worlds, and Columbus found America and Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape. Science awoke and sought new explanations of the world. And what a difference this attitude creates in the range and flight of all literature !

43. The New Learning in England—Prose Works. We cannot here mention more than the chief names of those who in England raised aloft the new beacon lights. Among them were some whose function was simply that of learning and teaching the classical tongues, so that their fellow-countrymen might turn that teaching to measureless account in literary creation. Grocyn and Linacre at Oxford, Cheke and Smith at Cambridge, Colet in London, were potent agents in the diffusion of the New Learning. It was soon carried into schools throughout the country,

and, among others, into a certain grammar-school at Stratford-on-Avon, from which a Shakespeare was soon to come. Among scholars who were men of letters in the more special sense are to be reckoned Desiderius Erasmus, Sir Thomas More, William Tyndale, and Roger Ascham. Though ERASMUS was Dutch by birth, and though his writing is in Latin, his influence in and on England was direct and great. He and MORE were close and congenial friends. They are incarnations of the Renascence* in its best form, of liberalism without violence, criticism without truculence, culture without pedantry, grace without weakness. More's *Utopia*,† of which the notion is borrowed from Plato's *Republic*, represents an ideal commonwealth. It was written in Latin in 1516, and Englished by Robinson in 1551, and it anticipates the chief of our best modern social views or reforms. In 1525 Tyndale and Coverdale translated the New Testament into English of great strength and simplicity, which served as the basis and guide for the later *Authorised Version*. Ascham, in his *Toxophilus*‡ and his *Scholemaster* (1570) wrote on both the athletic and the intellectual side of education. The spirit of all these men was a spirit of good sense, clearness, and of real thought under a style of simple dignity.

44. Effects of the Renascence on English Poetry. In poetry a pronounced effect of the Renascence begins to be seen in Sir Thomas WYATT and Henry Earl of SURREY. The year 1540 will suffice to mark their date, although the full force of their influence could only be felt with the publication of their poems in *Tottel's Miscellany* (a collection by Tottel, in 1557, of songs and sonnets

* Or Renaissance (the French form) = "new birth."

† The word is incorrectly formed from the Greek words for "no place" = nowhere.

‡ Greek for "loving the bow," the subject being archery as an exercise.

by these writers and others). They had both steeped themselves in the literary art of Petrarch and in the sentiment of his school, and were the first to introduce into England poetry of that Italian kind known as "Amorist," or "Amorettist"—a mixture of love and metaphysics, afterwards brought to its perfection in Shakespeare's *Sonnets.* Though in themselves they are doubtless of minor rank, they served a far-reaching purpose by stripping away much harshness and uncouthness from our lyrical poetry, and preparing a more polished "poetical manner" for the great Elizabethans. They also introduced new metres and forms of verse from Italy. These included the sonnet and "sequence of sonnets" after the manner of Petrarch—a series addressed to the same person—which became so popular in the Elizabethan age, and also the blank verse which was to prove so powerful an instrument in the hands of Marlowe and Shakespeare. The name which they and their followers obtained is one well-fitting—the "Company of Courtly Makers." It is of interest to observe that nearly half the compositions in *Tottel's Miscellany* are of unknown authorship, and that the poets of the time were not eager to have their manuscript poems published. They were often men of position, who were content to circulate and interchange their efforts among their friends. The *Miscellany* itself is in all probability the "book of songs and sonnets" referred to by Slender in Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor.* Among poets of the time we must not fail to mention Thomas SACKVILLE (Lord Buckhurst), whose verses in the *Induction* to the *Mirror for Magistrates* (1563) possess high merits of both form and substance, and may be regarded as a midway link between the subject-matter of Chaucer and the melodious dignity and eloquence of Spenser.

CHAPTER VII

Rise of the Drama till 1575

45. Long Development of Drama. Since we have now reached the period in which the drama is to become the most conspicuous part of our literature, and in particular to embody the mighty genius of Shakespeare, we must here stop and look back over the birth and growth of that form of composition. The great Elizabethan drama did not rise out of nothing in a single day, nor did it reach perfection in a single generation. All great developments have some modest beginnings, and the rudiments of dramatic art had been worked into shape by lesser labourers for several generations before the days of Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Ben Jonson. In dealing with the previous periods we have not mentioned efforts in this field, partly because those efforts produced no distinguished works which we can justly call "literature," and partly because it is more convenient to take a survey of the whole subject together. It must be understood, therefore, that we now run rapidly through the Anglo-Norman and Chaucerian periods, the Barren Age, and the Tudor Revival, tracing the growth and changes of English drama.

46. Miracle Plays. All nations develop a drama in some way, and of some shape or other. The first dramas in modern Europe arose in connection with the Church, just as Greek drama arose in connection with the worship of the god Dionysus. In an age when men could not

read, and when their minds were most forcibly impressed by striking realistic pictures, the clergy endeavoured to instruct them in religion by means of actual representations of scenes from the Bible history, or from the legends of saints. In the churches (or against their walls), and in the abbeys, such performances were given by priests, monks, and servants of the Church on days of festival, such as Christmas and Easter. The murder of Abel by Cain, the story of the Deluge, the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel—these were the kind of scenes enacted in what we should now hardly consider a very decorous way, since, to relieve too much gloom or the appearance of sermonising, a good deal of rough and even coarse jesting and comic action was gradually included in the performance. The Deity, angels, mankind, and devils were equally allowable as actors. Properly such dramatisations, when dealing with matter drawn from the Bible, were called MYSTERIES,* but if from legends of the Church and lives of saints, they were named MIRACLE PLAYS. In England, however, this distinction was not observed, and the only term in use for both was "miracle" plays. Such pieces were originally acted at the sacred building by ecclesiastics only, generally of the younger sort, and were composed in Latin. But as time went on and the audiences became greater, they were performed in English in the church-yard, in broad streets, or on the village green. Their connection with the Church being then less manifest, laymen began to take a part, till gradually these superseded the ecclesiastics altogether. The plays were also enlarged, their scenery elaborated, and more comic license permitted. It also became regular for them to be performed by members of various trades, who at that time were united in guilds, each such trade-

* More correctly "mistery," a contraction of *ministerium* = "service."

guild taking a particular part or scene in a long-continued action, or, in other words, a play within a play. It naturally followed also that a special class of adepts in such performances began to make a business of them, and to become in a sense "strolling" players, visiting smaller places where local talent could hardly suffice for itself.

In the most flourishing days of these religious plays they were commonly performed upon what was known as a "pageant"* (or "pagond"), that is to say, a wooden structure of two stories. In the towns there would be a number of these, which were rolled on wheels from street to street, and, after a scene had been performed at one such "station," the pageant moved on to another, and its successor took its place. Where there was more room for spectators the pageant itself was divided into sections, with a scene performed in each. At first the scenery was crude enough. For instance, clouds of wool suspended on rings might indicate Heaven, while Hell was represented by a huge mouth vomiting fire. Later, at the larger centres, the spectacular properties became more elaborate and costly. A favourite character in these pieces (next to the tormented and comically-treated Devil) was the ranting and braggart Herod. The bad characters were commonly given the appearance of Saracens, since this was the age of the Crusades, when the Saracens were the embodiment of "limbs of Satan."

For the creation of plays of this kind the great centres were Wakefield (in Yorkshire), Chester, and Coventry; and collections of the respective works produced are still extant.

The earliest miracle play known to us in England dates from the year 1110, and, with such changes as have been described, this was for three hundred years practically

* Latin *pagina* in later (not classical) times = "scaffold-plank."

the only kind of drama in vogue in the country, nor did it wholly die out till the sixteenth century.

47. Morality Plays. The next step in drama is from the representation of Biblical and legendary characters to characters of a more general type, not yet the men and women of actual life around, but personified qualities and attributes. In these the various Virtues and Vices are treated as *dramatis personæ*, and we may find, for example, Pride, Gluttony, and Avarice contending with Temperance, Humility, and the like, until Virtue inevitably wins the day. These allegorical pieces were called "morality" plays, inasmuch as they were supposed to enforce a moral truth, just as the "miracle" plays were supposed to impart lessons in religious history. It is natural that they should arise in an age which loved all other allegories, whether in poetry, as the *Romance of the Rose*, or in pictures. It is clear that, since there was no need in these to keep to recorded Bible history or legend, there was room for considerable invention of plot. Hence we are provided with a most important step towards the full and free drama which was to come later. Prominent in the "moralities" is the "Vice," who (like Harlequin) wears a mask and carries a wooden sword, and whose business it is to torment the "Devil" in comical ways. From the Vice was developed in later drama the humorous "Clown" or "fool," to whom for a time the term "Vice" was actually attached. We cannot state definitely when "moralities" first appeared in England, but it appears to have been in the Chaucerian age, although we know nothing of them from specimens till about the year 1450. In the reign of Henry VIII. they were very popular. It is worth observing that the later "moralities" themselves show a step towards the free drama, when, as sometimes occurred, an actual type of real life, *e.g.*, "a taverner" or "a young man,'

was added among the characters to the personified abstractions.

48. Interludes and Masques. In the intervals between parts of the miracle plays or moralities there arose a habit of inserting short compositions in dialogue, mostly of an amusing nature. Similar pieces were often performed among the items at Court and other festivities. These were called INTERLUDES. By John HEYWOOD (who flourished about 1530) they were made into entertaining farces, dealing no longer with abstractions but with actual specimens of humanity and their humours. Corresponding to our "private theatricals" and tableaux, there also grew up the MASQUE (or "mask"), in which the actors represented allegorical and mythical characters, and in which the scenery and dresses were of studied gorgeousness.

49. First Shaping of the "Regular" Drama. To this point had dramatic creation arrived when England began to feel the full tide of the Revival of Learning and Art. It had got near to common life, and to a more or less ingenious plot. It was natural that, with the classical models now before them in the shape of the Latin comedy of Plautus and Terence, and the Latin tragedy of Seneca, writers should make some attempt to create a regular and artistic drama as a branch of literature. It is true that the Latin drama was never the equal of the Greek in construction or in wit; but yet there was much to be learned from the Latin in the way of building a play with convenient acts and scenes, and in the art of literary words. Nicholas UDALL, headmaster of Eton, therefore wrote his comedy of *Ralph Roister Doister* (1541) in imitation—though not servile imitation—of Plautus; and SACKVILLE and NORTON their tragedy (1561) of *Ferrex and Porrex* (later called *Gorboduc*) after the model of Seneca. These plays are in themselves of little account, and the Latin principle was

soon felt to be in many respects a wrong one; but their names are worth recording as those of the first regular dramas in the comedy and tragedy which were destined to become so splendid in the next generation.

50. Summary of the Tudor Revival (A.D. 1510-1575):—

A.D. 1516. MORE'S *Utopia* (Latin form).
[1551 Englished.]
1520-1540. HEYWOOD'S *Interludes.*
1527. TYNDALE'S New Testament.
1541. UDALL'S *Ralph Roister Doister.*
1545. ASCHAM'S *Toxophilus.*
1557. *Tottel's Miscellany* (SURREY, WYATT, etc.).
1561. SACKVILLE'S *Gorboduc (Ferrex and Porrex).*
1563. SACKVILLE'S *Induction* to *Mirror for Magistrates.*
[1560-1570. Translations of the Classics appearing, *e.g.*, Ovid, Seneca, Virgil.]
1570. ASCHAM'S *Scholemaster.*

CHAPTER VIII

THE ELIZABETHAN PERIOD (1575-1625)

(*a*) GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

51. Elizabethan Fertility and its Causes. The Elizabethan period of English writing has been its richest hitherto, and it can perhaps nowhere be matched, except by a similar outburst of splendid literature in ancient Athens. At one epoch appeared Shakespeare, our greatest poet—greatest in insight, imagination, portraiture, constructive art, and expression; Bacon, a prince among clear reasoners and wielders of noble prose; Spenser, the master of melodious and varied verse, rich in eloquence and in high thoughts; and, besides these, a throng of other writers, who are indeed but like the secondary Alps beside Mont Blanc and the Jungfrau, but who are Alps nevertheless.

To lead up to this age, what was there going on in their childhood, while, as a genial American writer * has said, Spenser was still delving over his Latin grammar, Raleigh launching his paper ships, Shakespeare stretching out his baby hands for the moon, and Bacon discovering that matter was impenetrable by chewing at his coral? And what was going on during their early manhood?

First and foremost, there had been the "Revival of Learning" already described.† Besides its intellectual effect, this brought an abundance of new literary material

* James Russell Lowell. † Sec. 42.

to be used and reshaped by our own writers. Versions of Greek and Roman classics were already growing numerous before 1575, and grew still more numerous afterwards. With these came a flood of stories—good, bad, and indifferent, translated or untranslated—from Spain and Italy. Secondly, the art of printing was now in full use, and all this wealth of matter was thereby made at once accessible. Third, not only was there the keenest enthusiasm for literature in education, but the state of society and the country was such as to foster in ordinary life all literary tastes and interests. Peace (at least within the borders of the land) and great prosperity will always encourage many to devote their energies to things of the mind. The Courts of the Tudor sovereigns also helped to set the tone for distinguished forms of literature. Fourth, this was an age of discovery and enterprise. It was rather new worlds than the New World which had been discovered in 1492, and curiosity, imagination, and the pursuit of novelty were working in every direction. Furthermore, the language had learned the use of the most beautiful metrical forms, and had also acquired a copious and rhythmical vocabulary, but had not yet learned to vulgarise itself by carelessness and slang. And, lastly, for some inscrutable reason there appeared at this date an amazing crop of genius, such as no age of our literature has reached, and only the earlier part of the nineteenth century has approached. It would indeed seem as if one genius produces others, since men work to their highest level, and almost transcend themselves, when they are vying with a mightier ability than their own. When several giant minds appear at once, the general average of writing is prompted to lift itself, just as amid tall trees the lesser trees grow higher in their efforts to reach the sun.

52. Qualities of Elizabethan Literature. The period throughout was one both of richness and of the "grand style." In respect of language alone the writers possess a combination of range, force, rhythmic feeling, and dignity which no other epoch can show. The language of the Authorised Version of the Bible (1611) could hardly have gathered so many excellences at any other period. The 15,000 words of Shakespeare are not mere number. They are varied for shades of meaning, for humour, pathos, and harmony, and Shakespeare is herein only better in degree, and not in kind, than the dramatist Marlowe, the poet Spenser, and the essayist Bacon. In this period, again, a rich variety of golden facts, ideas, fancies, and suggestions seem to lie before every writer. There is an exuberance of healthy and joyous imagination. The writers seem compelled to utter fine things. Comparisons, illustrations, and metaphors appear to well up from within them. With these gifts there go a width of sympathy and understanding, a large range and depth of human interest, and a remarkable liberality of judgment. A Shakespeare feels with all feelings, thinks with all thoughts, and recognises that all such feelings and thoughts have a right to be considered and understood. So too Spenser, devout man though he is, has no sympathy with the narrow Puritans, "that ungracious crew which feigns demurest grace," and which goes like a vandal to destroy even the things of beauty in a sanctuary in which it has ceased to believe. The Elizabethans were, in short, men of large and full natures. And, for a final virtue, we find everywhere a lofty and eager spirit of fond patriotism, the same which is shown in Shakespeare's

> This happy breed of men, this little world,
> This precious stone set in the silver sea,
> This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England.

Meanwhile, on the other hand, we often find in these writers the defects of their qualities. Great inspiration and imagination are always apt to run into extravagance and riot. The writer may sometimes outshoot the mark and pass from the sublime to bombast. His rush of thought may hurry his pen into confusing two pictures and so "mixing his metaphors." The vice of style called "Euphuism" (to be explained later) was rampant. Criticism was hardly born. Knowledge was unscientific. Everywhere we are met by errors of history and fact. Sea-coasts are placed in Bohemia, and the Trojans wear Elizabethan rapiers. But the Elizabethans were commonly unaware of such little mistakes of detail, and felt no discomfort at them. In any case, blemishes of this kind sink into nothingness beside the boundless display of genius in the creation of delightful or overwhelming masterpieces.

CHAPTER IX

THE ELIZABETHAN PERIOD (1575-1625)

(*b*) POETRY (OTHER THAN DRAMATIC)

53. Poetry of Spenser. Of very high rank in the list of English poets, and especially beloved of later poets themselves for his sweet and noble charm of eloquent verse and his fertile invention, stands EDMUND SPENSER. For him Surrey and Sackville had prepared the way, while his own culture in French, Italian, and the classics had improved and refined his gifts. From the picturesque and musical pastoral poems or eclogues * called the *Shepheard's Calendar* (1579) he passed to more refined and more ambitious work, which culminated in his unfinished allegory of the *Faerie Queene* (1590-1595). A friend of Sir Philip Sidney and of Sir Walter Raleigh, and for a time a protégé of Queen Elizabeth, he divided his literary life between London and Kilcolman Castle in the south of Ireland, where he had received a grant of land, but from which he was driven by the disturbances of that country just before his death, which occurred in 1599. Even without his *Faerie Queene* his fame would have been secured by the beautiful compositions of his sonnet-sequence † called *Amoretti*,‡ and his superb marriage-poems *Epithalamion* and *Prothalamion*, of which

* An *eclogue* is properly a "selection" or short poem, but came to be used particularly of the poetry dealing with picturesque aspects of the life of rural folk, called "pastoral."

† See Sec. 44.

‡ Italian = "little loves."

the peculiar charm, like that of all the best lyrical poetry, defies full analysis. But his renown is chiefly associated with the *Faerie Queene*. This is written in a stanza which he had himself modified from an Italian pattern, and which bears his name, the "Spenserian." So admirably suited did it prove to the telling of a protracted story that, when Shelley, Byron, and Keats sought for the best vehicle for a similar purpose, they agreed in adopting the Spenserian stanza. Spenser was well read in the Chaucerian literature, and his piece is not only an allegory (though of a more ambitious and more complicated kind than those of the fourteenth century), but is also marked by a frequent use of English words which are more Chaucerian than Elizabethan. Of the twelve books or cantos* which were intended, only six are completed, and the whole does not therefore carry out the poet's design, which was to represent twelve Virtues† contending, under the shape of twelve knights, with the twelve corresponding Vices, and subduing them. To crown all was to come Arthur, the great-souled embodiment of all-round virtue, who in the end should wed Gloriana, the Faerie Queene. To create this poem Spenser had steeped himself in all sorts of reading, including in especial the chivalrous Romance of the great Italian Ariosto, the Arthurian tales of Malory, and the lore of Greek and Roman poets and philosophers. It is full of wondrous beings and wondrous scenes, of adventures of prowess and chivalry, all told with a marvellous ease and fulness of language, and with an unfailing grave nobility of tone. Doubtless in the mere structure of his allegory Spenser sometimes grows confused, for the reason that he attempts to include too much, too many tiers of meaning. His virtues and vices personified (under names mostly imitated from Italian, or taken from Arthurian

* See Sec. 5. † *i.e.*, in the Latin sense of *virtutes*, "excellences of manhood."

stories) stand also for certain historical personages then prominently before the public mind. Occasionally this causes some awkwardness. Thus Gloriana (the embodiment of Glory), the Faerie Queene, is Elizabeth; but Britomart (who represents Chastity) is Elizabeth also. Yet generally the double reference is as skilful as such things can very well be, and, if Duessa is the personification of Deceit, there was no reason why she should not also stand to the mind of Spenser and his readers for Mary Queen of Scots. Now that the historical feuds are things of the past, the Faerie Queene is not a poem to be read through all at once; it can, however, be read as a narrative without regard to the allegorical meaning, and, so long as the language lasts, nothing can destroy the charm of its fine music, its abundance of pictures, and its high thought.

54. Other Poets of the Time. Leaving the non-dramatic poems of Shakespeare for separate mention, we may glance briefly at the work of other poets of the time. England was now indeed a "nest of singing birds," and it must suffice to speak of them rather by classes than by individuals and their dates. Some of the best of the short lyrical pieces which had been written in the reign of Elizabeth—often verses of a wonderfully graceful and singable quality—made their appearance simply in collections such as *England's Helicon* (1600) and Davison's *Poetical Rhapsody* (1602). After *Tottel's Miscellany* many similar compilations appeared, bearing such fanciful names as a *Paradise of Dainty Devices* (1576). Yet of those who published poems under their own names the number is great, and some of the names are eminent.

We may speak first of the writers of SONNETS. The sonnet, which had been introduced into England by Wyatt and Surrey,* particularly by the latter in his

* See Sec. 39.

sonnet-sequence addressed to "Geraldine," soon became a favourite form with all poets of a lyric turn. This stanza of fourteen lines appeared, and still appears, to possess a special fitness for the rounded and harmonious expression of some single thought and its application, but it is a difficult form to handle with perfection. Yet several of the Elizabethans produced sonnets of great beauty. Among these the *Amoretti* of Spenser have been already mentioned. Other sequences were those of Sir Philip SIDNEY (*Astrophel and Stella*), Samuel DANIEL (*Delia*), Michael DRAYTON (*Idea*), the Scottish poet William DRUMMOND, and, greatest of all, those of SHAKESPEARE. We need not assume that such sequences are in every case the expression of a literal passion for some actual person. Sometimes, doubtless, they are so, but at other times the English sonneteers follow the Italian fashion in choosing or inventing someone to whom to address the thoughts and moods which poets feel.

Other lyrists were better known for their SONGS, as for instance (besides the writers in the collections already named) Thomas CAMPION and Sir Walter RALEIGH. There are indeed few of the poets of this period (including the dramatists, such as Shakespeare, Marlowe, Dekker, and Jonson) who did not compose songs of peculiar freshness, grace, sweetness, or daintiness.

Some of the poets, again, turned particularly to PATRIOTIC or HISTORICAL themes, their aim being the glorification of their country, which at this time was asserting a high position, particularly on the seas, among the powers of Europe. Chief of these were William WARNER, Samuel DANIEL, and Michael DRAYTON. All these, especially Daniel, were men with great command of English, and with inexhaustible ease of verse. Warner's *Albion's England* is a history of England from the earliest legends to Eliza-

beth, written in a swinging metre which seemed to his contemporaries to recall the Greek epic of Homer. But it is not mere history without poetry, since the author lets his imagination play around the bare chronicle, and constantly varies the whole with vivacious story. "Well-languaged" Daniel's *Civil Wars* is written in an excellent style, but lacks the life and warmth which poetry should possess. Drayton's principal work of the kind is the *Barons' Wars*, followed by the *Polyolbion*, a rich description of England county by county, but rendered monotonous by the immense number (30,000) of its long and uniform lines. In effect it becomes a kind of "versified guidebook."

Finally, we must not pass over such work in verse as George CHAPMAN'S translation of Homer's *Iliad*. Though this is a rendering of another and greater poet, it illustrates, by its free vigour and imaginative additions, the spirit in which the Elizabethans approached the ancient classics and turned them to use. There would be little value, in a sketch of this kind, in enumerating the various philosophical, religious, and satirical efforts of various writers whose names (*e.g.*, Davies, Donne, and Hall) will be found in any catalogue of the Elizabethan age. Nor is there anything in the easy and pleasant *Pastorals* of Browne to call for further remark.

55. Non-Dramatic Poetry of Shakespeare. Of Shakespeare and his dramas we are to speak hereafter; but it is best to glance at him at this point as a writer of other poetry, and chiefly as the greatest of sonneteers. Besides the charming and touching lyrics which are met with in his plays, he was the author of the narrative poems called *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, and of more than 150 sonnets, many of which would have been in themselves sufficient to bring the highest renown to any writer. *Venus and Adonis* is a love-story belonging to Shakespeare's

immature time, but full of sweetness and of eloquent descriptive power; *Lucrece* shows a step forward in strength and feeling. Both are written in melodious stanzas, which the master handles with perfect command; but we may regard these as efforts of his poetical apprenticeship, and we may be glad that the gifts of Shakespeare were soon to be turned into channels more worthy of them. The *Sonnets* were composed at various times of his life before their publication in 1609, but probably we should not look in them for any consistent story of the poet's own relations to some historical person. They are rather to be treated as answering to phases in his emotional history, to which we neither have a proper key nor are likely to find one. Far more important than such questions is the fact that they contain, as Wordsworth says, a wide range of "exquisite feelings felicitously expressed." There is in them a perfect accord of the language with the thought and mood. Even if the words meant nothing, their grave music would inevitably move us like the softer sounds of an organ, but into the words Shakespeare has meanwhile compressed the force of deep imagination, graceful fancy, strong feeling, and pathetic reflection.

CHAPTER X

THE ELIZABETHAN PERIOD (1575-1625)

(c) ELIZABETHAN PROSE

56. Rise of the Novel. It is in the Elizabethan time that the English novel in prose takes its first recognisable shape. Previously there had been various kinds of tales, the most ambitious being the verse narratives of chivalry and romance, such as those concerning the heroic adventures of Roland or King Arthur, and similar stories, full of giants, enchanters, and combat, tempered by love passages. There had been allegorical tales, there had also been short stories of ordinary life, based on the French *fabliaux*,* and occasionally short tender tales in a mixture of prose and verse. Each of these kinds—romantic deed, allegory, love story, and story of common life—had been handled by Chaucer. Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* had supplied the English world with the Arthurian legends in prose. Moreover, the printing press soon flooded England with the prose short stories and little novels translated from French, Spanish, and Italian. It is amusing now to look at many of these, with their quaint cuts, which serve at one time for Alexander the Great, at another for Romulus, and then once more for Guy of Warwick. Except for the few stories of common life, such compositions hardly make pretence to reality, and the scenes are mostly in an imaginary world, where one is at liberty to put quite impossible men and

* See Sec. 24.

make them do quite impracticable things. SIDNEY'S *Arcadia* (in progress in 1580) is the outcome of this romantic unreality of the old style. For that reason we may speak of it first, although (as the next section will relate) it actually appeared later than a most important novel of a newer type, to which it is obviously much indebted. The work is a tale of that "Arcadia" which is the pastoral land of Nowhere, a place in which princes and knights dally among shepherds, amid all manner of fantastic disguises and improbabilities, amid abundant love and a profusion of adventure, displaying infinite valour and an amazing nicety of sentiment. With its prose is mingled much verse. Its construction is, however, weak, for fiction is an art which needed yet to learn its business, and the *Arcadia*, grown to unwieldy bulk, had no necessary end at all. Meanwhile its language is strongly marked by "Euphuism," and this fact leads us to the consideration of that term and of the novel called *Euphues* from which it arose.

57. Lyly's Euphues, and "Euphuism." In the year before the *Arcadia* was being written there appeared the *Euphues* of John LYLY. This, despite its quaint peculiarities, is the first step towards a novel of actual life. It contains no knights and giants, shepherds and Arcadias, but men and women—at least those of a certain class and style—in Italy and England. Its two parts are *Euphues or Anatomy of Wit*, and *Euphues and his England.* In the first a cultivated young Greek named Euphues visits Naples, falls in love with a lady who prefers him to his Italian friend Philautus, but is eventually rejected equally with him. The plot is slender, and is chiefly a text for the discourses and reflections of Lyly himself. In the second part Euphues and Philautus come to England, and again the story, so far as one exists, serves as an

excuse for dissertations on the country, its rulers and its ways. But though the narrative is of little account, the way, or style, in which it is written demands particular notice. The effect of the study of the new classical models—at least those in Greek—should have been to refine language, to teach it to be beautiful though clear, forcible without bombast, expressive without exaggeration. And this lesson those models did teach to the wiser scholars. But there were also perverse scholars, of whom Bacon tells us that they "began to hunt more after words than matter, more after the choiceness of the phrase and the sweet falling of the clauses, and the varying and illustration of their words with tropes and figures, than after the weight of matter and worth of subject." This occurred after the Revival of Learning in Italy, in France, and perhaps most of all in Spain. Among those who were guilty of such vice of style was the author of *Euphues*.

The words and sentences are in themselves for the most part clear and simple enough. The peculiarity was in "the immoderate prodigious use of similes,* antitheses, and alliterations." Everything mentioned is immediately compared to something else, or to three or four things, and the similes are largely derived from a mythology and history, a zoology and botany, which are derived from the bad, because entirely fanciful, "science" of the middle ages. Every trivial remark requires a parallel, to be drawn from plants, stones, and animals possessed of most extraordinary qualities. Thus Lyly writes: "The foul toad hath a fine stone in his head; the fine gold is found in the filthy earth; the sweet kernel lyeth in the hard shell; virtue is harboured in the heart of him that most men esteem misshapen. . . .

*A simile compares two things, with the word "like" or "as"; antithesis is the balancing of one clause by another, the second stating something in contrast to the statement in the first.

Do we not commonly see that in painted pots is hidden the deadliest poison? that in the greenest grass is the greatest serpent? in the clearest water the ugliest toad?" and so on. Manifestly there is no necessary end to this sort of passage, until all nature is falsified and the dictionary exhausted. It was this, however, combined with plays upon the sound of words, which constituted "Euphuism." The book was immensely popular, and polite society quickly imitated its style in conversation. Ladies and gentlemen wrote Euphuism and talked Euphuism, and thought themselves clever and witty, as perhaps they were. Many writers also hastened to adopt the style. Sidney's *Arcadia*, for example, cultivates a species of Euphuism. The novelists Greene and Lodge sometimes wrote in the same vein. The age was full of fancy, and clever people were inclined to give their fancy free play in this direction. It is true that Shakespeare, Drayton, Nash and others ridiculed the Euphuists, and that the greatest writers of both poetry and prose, such as Spenser and Bacon, were untouched by it; nevertheless its trail is over very much of the writing of the end of the sixteenth century.

58. Other Novelists and Novels. Robert GREENE, Thomas LODGE, and Thomas NASH are the chief writers who call for mention as Elizabethan story writers. These were all bright spirits, by no means alike in their tastes. Greene began with novels of the old school, with wars and princesses and goddesses, but ended in the new school with contemporary Englishmen and contemporary facts. Nash is a novelist of realism and "humours"—*i.e.*, character types—like a Fielding born out of due season. His *Jack Wilton* is the first example in England of the roguish* "life and adventures" kind which had been popular in

* Commonly known as "picaresque," from the Spanish *picaro*, "rogue.'

Spain. Lodge indulges in long stories in which conversations and letters play a principal part. Of great importance, apart from such intrinsic interest as these and other novels—English or translated—possess, is the fact that they prepared audiences for the dramatists, and supplied the dramatists themselves with plots and subjects. *Rhomeo and Julietta*, for instance, was a novel before it became Shakespeare's play. Greene's *Pandosto* was converted into Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*. The *Rosalind* of Lodge was the source of *As You Like It*.

59. The Essay and the Literature of Thought: Bacon. To Francis BACON, Lord Verulam, a great lawyer and Lord Chancellor, belongs the credit of writing the first "Essays" in the English language. These were three times published and twice enlarged in the period 1597-1625, and though the idea of such a form of writing is due to the recent essays of the Frenchman Montaigne (1580), both the matter and the treatment of Bacon are original to himself. The mind of Bacon was both massive in itself and also highly cultivated, and in the *Essays* there is to be found a combination of clear sane judgment with acute reasoning and perfectly concise expression. But of more importance, in Bacon's own view, and very valuable even now, was his *Advancement of Learning* (1605). Like the Greek Aristotle, whom he much resembles in other respects, he had "taken all knowledge for his province," and was moved to encourage a philosophy which should be based upon copious and careful observation and experiment in all branches of knowledge, and should thence end in practical results. His *Advancement of Learning* discusses with striking clearness and wisdom the value of knowledge, and the prevailing defects in education and thinking, which unfit them for the end which he had in view. The book is made "literature" by the fine power with which it is

written. His Latin *Novum Organum* ("new means" or 'instrument") of 1620 continues the question of the right methods of prosecuting study and enquiry, and his unfinished *New Atlantis* (treating of an imaginary region after the style of More's *Utopia*) pictures an ideal association, engaged in sound methods for establishing and enlarging knowledge in all its branches.

60. Other Prose Literature: History, Travels, etc. There is much serious prose writing of the time which it must suffice merely to mention with a passing note. HISTORY is represented by Bacon's judicial account of *Henry VII.*, and by Raleigh's *History of the World*, a vast conception, inaccurately and unevenly written, with rhetorical passages occasionally decorating the bare record of events. TRAVELS appear in *Hakluyt's Voyages* (1589), which were widely read, as they would have deserved to be for their "Homeric" simplicity alone. The literature of CRITICISM grew into vigorous life in Sidney's *Apologie for Poetry* (1595). TRANSLATIONS were in great demand, and were often finely performed, as in North's rendering of Plutarch's *Lives* (1579), in the famous versions of the classics by Philemon Holland, in Florio's *Montaigne*, Fairfax's *Tasso*, and, most perfect and monumental of all, the *Authorised Version* of the Bible (1611). Nor must we forget the curious accumulation of vast learning and quaint humour which appears in the bulky volume by Robert BURTON known as the *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). Richard HOOKER'S *Ecclesiastical Polity* is also a fine specimen of Elizabethan English.

CHAPTER XI

THE ELIZABETHAN PERIOD (1575-1625)

(*d*) ELIZABETHAN DRAMA

61. Vogue of Elizabethan Drama: Steps in its History. The chief glory of the Elizabethan age is its drama, although it must be admitted that the special eminence of that department is chiefly due to the altogether extraordinary work of Shakespeare. Without him there would, indeed, still have been an immense body of dramatic composition, but in the height of artistic excellence there would have been as much difference as there is between the first and second pyramids of Egypt. The Elizabethan age was one fond of amusement, and much given to shows and pageants. The taste for stories was in full swing. The way for the "regular" drama had been prepared by the elaboration of the Moralities and Interludes, and by the "classical" efforts of Udall and Sackville.* In 1576 the first real theatres were opened, and at the right time appeared a remarkable number of men of genius. Though no fixed lines can be drawn at certain dates, it is easy to see in the dramatic history of this period three strata. More properly we should speak of three groups of writers, of which on the whole it may also be said that one succeeds another. These groups are those of the UNIVERSITY WITS, the SHAKESPEARIAN GROUP, and the GROUP OF THE DECLINE. The first includes such

* See Sec. 44.

men as LYLY, PEELE, GREENE, and MARLOWE (roughly to be placed before 1593); to the second belong, besides SHAKESPEARE and JONSON, CHAPMAN and DEKKER; to the third, BEAUMONT and FLETCHER, WEBSTER, FORD, TOURNEUR, SHIRLEY, and MASSINGER. Perhaps the year 1610 may be regarded as approximately (though only approximately) marking the time at which the third group is replacing the second.

62. The Theatre and its Performances. Before we deal with these three successive groups we must look for a few moments at the theatres of the time. Before 1576 plays had been performed in the courtyards of inns and of large houses, or in other places in which a stage could be erected, while spectators might look on from the ground or from balconies. The plays themselves were not of the best in character, and both the performances and the actors were looked upon with much disfavour by the Puritans, who were now rising into strength. The actors in the interludes had mostly been employed for the purpose by noblemen; but they were afterwards permitted to form a sort of private company and to perform publicly for their own advantage. Such companies, calling themselves "Lord So-and-So's servants," became numerous as strolling players, till it proved necessary to treat them as rogues and vagabonds, unless they possessed a license from certain noblemen to whom alone the privilege was granted of having such nominal "servants." When this was done the duly chartered companies became reputable, and drew to themselves both writers and actors of ability. We hear of "Lord Leicester's Servants," the "Queen's Servants," the "Lord Chamberlain's Servants" (to whom Shakespeare attached himself at the Globe), and so on. In 1574 Elizabeth gave permission for plays to be performed in the city of London, but, when the Corporation

of London objected, the companies withdrew just outside the city boundaries, and set up the first regular theatres in the suburbs—then comparatively superior—of Blackfriars and Shoreditch. Among the number the "Globe" and the "Fortune" in time became the chief, and the strong rivalry of able managers and actors proved of much value for the advancement of the dramatic art.

The first theatres were poor wooden structures, round or six-sided, open at the top except above the stage and over the boxes around the sides. On the stage, which ran out towards the middle of the space, fashionable men might for an extra charge take their seats close to the side of the performers, while the "groundlings" stood on the level in front. Proper scenery did not exist; a few properties might be used to indicate a room, etc., but whether the scene was at Rome, or Alexandria, or London, would be told to the audience by a placard hung up at its commencement. Hence the descriptions which occur in the dramas were poetical substitutes for the scenery which would now-a-days be presented to the eye. The absence of scenery was to some extent counter-balanced by the extreme showiness and costliness of the dresses. More was necessarily left to the actors, and therefore their delivery and singing were cultivated to high excellence, although ranting actors were by no means unknown. All the actors were males, boys taking the part of the younger women. The performance began at about three o'clock and lasted for some two hours.

63. Drama of the "University Wits." Before the culmination of Shakespeare's genius, the chief writers for the stage were not themselves actors or practically connected with the theatres, but men of talent, and often of rather reckless "Bohemian" lives, who had mostly received a University education and were proud to distinguish

themselves from the mere player. They are often known as "scholar" dramatists or "University Wits."* Of these the best were GREENE, PEELE, and, greatest of them all, Christopher MARLOWE. Lodge, Nash, and Lyly are of minor account. Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, *Dr. Faustus*, *Jew of Malta*, and *Edward II.* show how firmly the genius of the writer was maturing, but unhappily he was killed in a tavern brawl at the age of twenty-nine, and we can only guess how nearly he might have approached Shakespeare. He could indeed never have equalled that excellence, since he lacked the subtle humour and delicate understanding of character which Shakespeare possessed. His most conspicuous quality is that of magnificent, imaginative, and fervid language, and his most conspicuous service to literature was that, having taken blank verse as the poetical form for drama, he threw into it a remarkable life and force of language, and a rhythm of natural accent, which free it from all its previous stiffness and formality. We have to thank Marlowe for a high example set to Shakespeare in this respect, and the "University Wits" in general for filling the Elizabethan drama with a fine literary strain. The actor-playwrights, including Shakespeare, might never have aimed so high without their aid. Greene, speaking for the scholar dramatists, may have alluded to Shakespeare as "a crow beautified with our feathers"; but the meaning is not that Shakespeare stole from them, but that here was a professional of the theatre taking upon himself to write against the "wits" from the Universities. Yet what was required to perfect the drama was precisely the genius who could combine their high literary standard with an intimate knowledge of audiences and the stage.

* "Wit" in its older sense means a person of education and talent, not necessarily "witty" in our modern meaning.

64. The Drama of England is "Romantic." It seems desirable here to comment on the happy fact that English drama, unlike that of France or Spain, is "Romantic." The word has a special sense in this connection, and is opposed to "Classical."* The Italians, and after them the French, made the mistake of going to the Latin Seneca for their models. But Seneca was no practical playwright. He had adopted the canons that a play should possess "three Unities," namely, Unity of Place, Unity of Time, and Unity of Action. In other words, it should represent one action proceeding in the same place and without breaks in the time. The English drama began (as in *Gorboduc*) to follow these principles, but it soon ignored them, and freely represented a whole story with many parts, for which the scene might be changed as far and as often as the writer chose—say from Sicily to Bohemia—and in which intervals of days, weeks, or even years, may be supposed to have elapsed. It is necessary, however, to say that Seneca is in no sense a fair example of the truly "Classical" method, and that the Unities of Place and Time, too often credited to the Greek Aristotle, are no doctrines of his.

65. William Shakespeare: Outline of his Life. Of the actual facts concerning Shakespeare's life little is known that is beyond question. He was born in 1564, at Stratford-on-Avon, in Warwickshire, and the greatest of English writers therefore appropriately comes from the heart of England. His father was a tradesman of the town, at first fairly well-to-do, but impoverished about the time when his son was in his teens. That William Shakespeare went to the grammar school in Stratford is entirely probable, but his general education was certainly left incomplete as compared with that of the "University

* See later, Sec. 87.

Wits." According to tradition, his youth in the country was rather wild, but whether he stole deer or not in the neighbouring woods of Charlecote, and for what motive he did so, if he did it at all, must ever remain doubtful. At the age of nineteen he made what appears to have been an unhappy marriage with Anne Hathaway, a young woman of twenty-six, living in a neighbouring village. He had two daughters and a son, but the latter died in boyhood, and no descendant of Shakespeare survived the next generation. Soon after (perhaps in 1586) he made his way to London, where he became associated with the theatrical world and with dramatic writers of the Marlowe and Greene group.

In his case (as in that of Burns) it was no misfortune for him, as a delineator of life and character, that his early associations were humble. He thus saw sides of life which he might not otherwise have seen. The humours of the people were brought home to him, while at the same time he acquired a valuable stock of vigorous Saxon phrases. Afterwards, when he mixed with various strata of society, with wits, players, and peers, he did not forget what he had known in youth; in fact, he appears to have been incapable of forgetting anything. At the same time his education—again like that of Burns—was probably much better than is usually supposed. The Stratford school was one upon which the revival of classical learning had had full effect, and when Ben Jonson says that Shakespeare knew "little Latin and less Greek" it is quite unwarrantable to interpret that phrase as meaning that he knew no Greek at all. Studies were very strenuous in Elizabethan schools. It must also be remembered that Ben Jonson spoke from the standpoint of an unusually learned man. But we may be sure that, whatever Shakespeare learned, he gathered from it all the essentials. He

was no ordinary boy, and possessed no ordinary receptiveness or memory. In later times, in London, he read the translations which were then in great demand; better still, in the Mermaid Tavern and elsewhere he conversed concerning these and their matter with plenty of "University Wits," and even with men of great learning like Jonson himself. The environment in which he found himself was one of high interests and intellectual standards, and the kinds of classics which were being absorbed and discussed, such as Aristotle, Plato, Plutarch, and Seneca, were books full of great thoughts. Again, a large part of education—indeed for the dramatist, the largest part—consists in shrewd observation, provided that it is a sympathetic observation, of the world. In Elizabethan London, life, particularly as lived by the men among whom Shakespeare moved, was picturesque, varied, and far more frank than now. Amid all this he learned his craft, doubtless picking the brains of the "University Wits," and fully recognising the high standard which they, and especially Marlowe, had established for a dramatist.

Of his narrative and lyric poetry we have spoken already.* Such verses as those of the *Venus and Adonis* necessarily brought him into note, and gained him literary patrons such as the Earl of Southampton. We do not know the exact circumstances of his life nor the exact order of his works, but it is tolerably certain that his early dramatic efforts were made in patching up and improving for the stage a number of plays already existing, such as *Titus Andronicus* and the first part of *Henry VI.* His peculiar skill manifested itself, and he soon became a writer of original plays, the first being *Love's Labour's Lost* (1591). Not only was he playwright, however; he was also an actor, and when he became a shareholder in theatrical manage-

* See Sec. 49.

ment he must have been a most successful man of business. In twenty years (1591-1611) he produced some thirty-seven dramas, including tragedies, comedies, mixed and historical plays, and proved himself a supreme master in every branch. By the time that he was thirty-five he was one of the owners and directors of the Globe Theatre, and had been able to purchase a creditable property and residence in his native town. At the age of forty-six he was in a position to retire from London—though he did not retire from writing—and to reside in affluence at Stratford. Till within five years of his death, which occurred on 23rd April, 1616, he continued to produce the masterpieces of which the list closes with either the *Tempest* or the *Winter's Tale.*

A common notion that he was not appreciated in his own day is entirely disproved, partly by his friendships with nobles like Southampton, Pembroke, and Essex, partly by his material prosperity, and still more by the eulogies passed upon him by a number of his contemporaries, including the sufficiently critical Ben Jonson. The genius of the "sweet swan of Avon," who "was not of an age, but for all time," by no means escaped the men of his own generation. There is sufficient testimony also to both his ready wit and his kindly manner in social intercourse. As regards any authentic representation of his personal appearance, we have to be content with a portrait which appeared in the first Folio (or large-page collection of his works) published seven years after his death (1623), and with a bust set up in the Stratford Church. Of himself he tells us nothing. The function of a dramatist is to picture men and women as they are and think and feel, not to obtrude himself. Students must always be on their guard against trying to prove by means of a quotation that Shakespeare thought this or that. The words are only

spoken by some character in Shakespeare because it is fit and proper for that particular character to speak them.

66. Stages in Shakespeare's Works. It would be out of place to pretend to discuss the plays of Shakespeare at any length. It must suffice to mark the chief steps in his progress. His work in drama falls into four periods, of about five years each. To the first belong his younger plays, in which there is an exuberance of wit and fancy and much ardour of passion, but not yet his own sure judgment or his independence of style. They are distinguishable partly by the large number of their rhyming lines, the greater frequency with which a line ends with a stop, and the regular measure of the line itself; partly by the excess of their puns and what are known as "conceits," that is, efforts of cleverness * to strike out remarkable and often far-fetched notions, often of a Euphuistic kind. Between the years 1591 and 1596 came *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and the historical plays *Richard II.*, *Richard III.*, and *King John.* As he advances and increases in self-reliance, in reach of thought and in experience of the world, his wit becomes riper, his humour varied and more subtle, his understanding of men deeper, and for the most part he frees himself from the excess of conceits and other turgidities of his first stage. He also drops most of the rhymes, and contents himself with the more natural expression of blank verse.

The second period (1596-1601) produced the rich variety, light-hearted throughout, of his *Merchant of Venice*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *Henry IV.*, *Henry V.*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Julius Cæsar*, *and Twelfth Night.*

* See later, Sec. 79.

A third period (1602-1607) finds him at his mental zenith. His humour is more grave, he is full of profound reflections on the more serious or tragic side of life, his expression is at its highest for imaginative power. To this time belong the four consummate masterpieces, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*. It also produced *Antony and Cleopatra*, and perhaps *Coriolanus*.

The fourth stage (1608-1611) is like the evening, when, as an ancient critic* said, the sun is as great and magnificent as ever, but his heat and brilliancy are less. *Cymbeline*, *The Tempest*, and *Winter's Tale* are the outcome of greater quietude and less strenuousness of a spirit perhaps becoming wearied with its own fertility.

67. Qualities of Shakespeare. To analyse the gifts of a great poet is generally very difficult, even if it is possible. But in Shakespeare it is easy to distinguish separately a number of eminent qualities. These are (1) his stupendous command of words, (2) his master power over rhythm—by which combined he never fails to express both the meaning and also the exact mood with its proper note and emphasis, (3) his profound knowledge of humanity, (4) his wide sympathies and tolerance, (5) the soundness of his sense and the sanity of his judgment, (6) his rich and varied wit and humour, (7) his infinite range of imagination. Not only did no man in any literature ever combine so many gifts, but Shakespeare actually seems to hold the first place in all of them. It is true that he is not flawless. He wrote for the stage rather than for print, and often wrote with speed and with a certain carelessness of power. Particularly in his younger days he shared the fault of his times by indulging in over-clever quibblings and tricks of words. The defective manners of his times often betray themselves in his conversations.

* Longinus.

But amid all this it should be remembered that Shakespeare's business was to make his men and women talk and act as real men and women did, and both the quibble and the coarseness must have appeared to him necessary with certain scenes and characters, if he was to "hold the mirror up to nature."

68. Ben Jonson. Very different from the work of Shakespeare is that of the learned Ben JONSON. To speak of his drama as representing a "decline" from the Shakespearian pattern is to speak in error. He wrote side by side with Shakespeare, but on different lines. The lines were less good, partly because Jonson lacked the mental and emotional breadth and the dramatic genius of Shakespeare, partly because his aims were inferior. While Shakespeare aims at representing in a true and lifelike way all sorts and conditions of men, with their complexities of character and motive and feeling, Jonson devotes himself particularly to depicting special types—eccentric persons with a ruling passion, then known as a "Humour." He gives us not nature in its truth, but nature in its exaggerations. His *Every Man in his Humour* (1596) and *Every Man out of his Humour*, his *Poetaster* and *Alchemist* are of this description. We have to thank these and his *Bartholomew Fair* for pictures—somewhat caricaturing pictures—of the times, but they are rather laborious reading in our day. His historical plays of *Sejanus* and *Catiline* are works rather of learning and eloquence than of living reality. Perhaps only his *Volpone the Fox* (1605) is worthy to be put beside a Shakespearian piece. The drama was the prevailing form of remunerative literature in the Elizabethan age; "rare Ben Jonson" was an able man with a well-stocked mind, and he naturally turned to drama; but it is no heresy to imagine that his best powers might have been displayed in other fields.

69. Decline of the Drama. The group of dramatists who came after Shakespeare's prime are not to be blamed for not attaining to his standard; their fault is rather that they did not strive towards it. BEAUMONT and FLETCHER (who wrote a large number of plays in common), WEBSTER, FORD, and MASSINGER are distinguished from their predecessor and his group by their love of the sensational, their deliberate leaning to coarse language and situations, and generally by the inferiority of their blank verse, which is often feeble and often rants. The most "Elizabethan" of them is John Webster, whose verse is frequently strong and his feeling intense—as in the famous *Duchess of Malfi*—but whose work is marred by its sensational excess of horror. Further discussion of writers like these belongs to larger books than the present.

70. Summary of Elizabethan Literature (1575-1625):—

A. D.	POETRY. (Lyric, Narrative, etc.)	DRAMA.	PROSE.
1576	... ...	[Theatres Built]	
1579	SPENSER'S *Shepheard's Calendar*	... ...	LYLY'S *Euphues*
1580	... ...	... ...	SIDNEY'S *Apologie for Poetry* and *Arcadia* (writing)
1584	... ...	Plays of Greene, Peele, etc.	
1586	WARNER'S *Albion's England*		
1587	... ...	MARLOWE: *Tamburlaine*,	
1588	... ...	*Jew of Malta*	
1589	... ...	... ...	Hakluyt's *Voyages*
1590	SPENSER'S *Faerie Queene* (I.-III.)	... ...	[*Arcadia* published]
1591	*Sonnets* of Sidney and Spenser	SHAKESPEARE: *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Romeo and Juliet*	
1592	Daniell's *Delia*		

Summary of Elizabethan Literature (1575-1625)—continued:

A.D.	POETRY. (Lyric, Narrative, etc.)	DRAMA.	PROSE.
1593	SHAKESPEARE: *Venus and Adonis*		
1594	SHAKESPEARE: *Lucrece* (and some sonnets) Drayton: *Idea*	*Midsummer Night's Dream*	Hooker: *Ecclesiastical Polity*
1596	SPENSER'S *Faerie Queene* (I.-VI.)	*Merchant of Venice* JONSON: *Every man in his Humour*	
1597	... ...	... ...	BACON: *Essays*
1598	Drayton: *Barons' Wars*		
1599	... ...	Globe Theatre opened with Shakespeare's *Henry V.* *As You Like It*	
1600	England's *Helicon*		
1602	... ...	*Twelfth Night*	
1603	... ...	*Hamlet* JONSON'S *Sejanus*	
1605	... ...	*Volpone*	BACON: *Advancement of Learning*
1606	... ...	*Macbeth*	
1608	... ...	*King Lear* (published)	
1609	SHAKESPEARE: *Sonnets* (published)	*Cymbeline*	
1611	Chapman's *Iliad*	*Winter's Tale* JONSON'S *Catiline*	Authorised Version of the Bible
1612	... ...	[Beaumont & Fletcher. Webster]	
1613	Drayton: *Polyolbion*		
1614	... ...	... ...	RALEIGH: *History of the World*
1616	Drummond's *Poems*	Shakespeare dies	
1620	... ...	... ...	BACON: *Novum Organum*
1621	... ...	... ...	Burton: *Anatomy of Melancholy*
1622	... ...	(Massinger)	
1623	... ...	(First Folio of Shakespeare)	

CHAPTER XII

THE CAROLINE PERIOD

I PERIOD OF CIVIL STRIFE (1625-1660)

(*a*) POETRY

71. John Milton. It will be remembered that we found it possible to divide Chaucer's literary career into three well-marked periods, and that we noted four fairly distinct stages in Shakespeare's work as a dramatist. When we look at Milton's writings as a whole, in like manner, a threefold division suggests itself; and the circumstances of Milton's life make it possible to draw the dividing lines more precisely than it would be justifiable to do in the case of Chaucer, or of Shakespeare. There is, first, the *early poetic period*, ending with the writing of *Lycidas* in 1637. Then follows a *prose period*, lasting till the Restoration in 1660; during all that time a handful of sonnets was Milton's sole contribution to English poetry. With the Restoration begins the *later poetic period*, to which belongs the great epic upon which his immortality mainly rests, as well as *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*.

It is convenient to mark such divisions, but we must not lose sight of the underlying unity of Milton's work. The young poet of twenty-one, singing, in the *Nativity Hymn*, of "the helméd Cherubim and sworded Seraphim," of the twice-battered god of Palestine and the bright-harnessed angels in the courtly stable, has given us already

more than a hint of the author of *Paradise Lost.* Shining through the poems of his youth we perceive clearly enough the stern Puritan ideal which animates the prose work of his middle life and the poetic work of his age. In the second period, again, though it is true that of verse he wrote little and published none, yet he was still a poet, as his exquisite sonnets testify, and he still cherished the dream of "leaving something so written to after times as they should not willingly let it die." And in the final period, while it is true that he wrote nothing of any consequence in prose, yet it is a mistake to suppose that he had lost interest in the subjects on which his prose pamphlets had been written. On the contrary, the great poems of this period are full of theological and political argument.

72. Milton's Early Poetic Period. John Milton was the son of a London scrivener, or law-stationer, and was born in London in 1608. He was educated at St. Paul's School and at Christ's College, Cambridge. From the first he was an ardent student, and he began very early to embody his thoughts in verse. His poetic career really begins, however, with the great *Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, written in 1629, while he was at Cambridge. In this poem he celebrates the coming of Christ and the overthrow of the false gods; already his imagination is ranging through heaven and hell, already his mind is pre-occupied with the lofty themes around which his great epic is to be written. In the sonorous and majestic diction of this hymn and of the slightly later fragment, *At a Solemn Music*, we discern already the "mighty-mouthed inventor of harmonies."

After leaving Cambridge, Milton spent six years at the village of Horton, near Windsor, whither his father had now retired. During these years he wrote little, but no man was ever less idle. He had now consciously

dedicated his life to the purpose of becoming a great poet, an end not to be attained, as he believed, without years of "labour and intent study." The few poems which he did write during this period of preparation, though written, in his opinion, "before the ripening year"—that is to say, while his genius was as yet immature—are all of such excellence as no other poet then living could have reached. It was at Horton that he wrote *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, two poems depicting two moods of a poet's mind—the gay and the pensive. These companion pictures have a place apart in Milton's work. In them he descends, for once, from the great heights where his spirit is accustomed to dwell, and there is a corresponding change in his style. The solemn and slow-moving manner which we call Miltonic here gives place to a light and tripping measure; nowhere else does he display such airy grace, such unstrained felicity. We may note, too, that in these poems the beauties of nature are described with a zest and gusto hardly to be found again in English poetry till the close of the eighteenth century. The *Arcades*, a fragment of a masque,* is of slight interest compared with the complete "Masque presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634," to which after Milton's death the title of *Comus* was given. Three years later, in 1637, he wrote *Lycidas*, a magnificent dirge for his friend Edward King, drowned on a voyage to Ireland. With this poem the first period closes.

Comus and *Lycidas* are both pastorals †—the one a pastoral drama, the other a pastoral elegy. That is to say, the real thoughts and feelings of the writer are presented to us in the setting of an imaginary world of shepherds and shepherdesses and mythological divinities—a world quite remote from reality. In both cases Milton's genius triumphs over this artificial machinery. Comparing *Comus*

* See Sec. 48. † See description of the *Arcadia*, Sec. 56.

with other masques of the period, we perceive at once that it is much less fitted for stage representation than the masques of many lesser poets, such as Ben Jonson or Fletcher, but that it is a much nobler poem than anything of theirs. Its superiority is due to the intense and glowing conviction that shines through its unrealities. It is an impassioned plea for self-restraint in the midst of a sensual and licentious world; and though the weight of its moral purpose is perhaps more than the pastoral form can bear, it is precisely this moral weight which redeems it from the triviality of the ordinary masque and makes it a poem worthy of Milton. So, too, with *Lycidas*; we feel, with Dr. Johnson, that the pastoral form gives to this elegy a somewhat unreal air. Full of beauty as it is, it does not impress us as an outburst of personal grief. As a modern critic puts it, *Lycidas* does not convince us that Milton's breakfast was spoilt when he heard that King was drowned. But there is no mistaking the fiery sincerity of the lines in which St. Peter is represented as denouncing the selfish worldlings who "creep, and intrude, and climb" into the highest offices of the church. This famous passage has been condemned as out of keeping with the tone of the whole; we should rather say that here Milton's genius breaks through and rises above the pastoral form. This apparent inconsistency is typical of all his early poetic work. We find him taking an innocent delight in quiet country pleasures; we see him revelling in classical literature and not insensible to the romance of the Middle Ages; loving what is best in modern poetry and drama; thoroughly appreciating the refined, artistic, gracious side of life. And amid all this we catch glimpses, every here and there, of the austere Puritan to whose consuming passion for righteousness all the world and all the glories of the world are as dross.

73. Milton's Prose Period. For the next twenty years—twenty of the stormiest years in England's history—Milton's pen was at the service of his party in its struggle against the feudal absolutism of the Stuarts, and afterwards in its efforts to maintain its hard-won supremacy. He deliberately laid aside the plan of a great poem which had been slowly shaping itself in his mind; he made up his mind that to write poetry while his countrymen were in the throes of a life-and-death struggle for liberty would be "a dereliction of his supremest duty." It is not necessary to give separate accounts of his numerous controversial tracts on Church-government, marriage, education, and politics. With the exception of the *Areopagitica*—a noble plea for liberty of thought and of speech—Milton's prose works are not now widely read. His conclusions are based on personal feeling rather than on reason; his arguments are deplorably apt to degenerate into mere scurrilous abuse of his opponents; and his style as a rule is obscure and involved.

The *Areopagitica* is free from these defects—except, perhaps, for occasional obscurities of style. If Milton is thought of as one of the greatest masters of English prose, it is on the strength of certain famous passages in this pamphlet. In these passages, and in a few autobiographical * fragments scattered up and down his other prose works, he rises to a height of majestic eloquence which is hardly even approached by any other English writer. But many other writers, quite incapable of writing such passages as these, yet maintain a far higher general level of excellence.

74. Milton's Later Poetic Period. The Restoration set Milton free to write the great poem of which all this time he had been dreaming; but his position was not

* "Autobiography" means "account of one's own life." (Greek, *autos*, self.)

enviable. The party he had loved and served was wrecked, the principles he honoured were openly flouted, and he himself was utterly discredited with the general public. He was now totally blind; his second wife was dead; his daughters were in a state of passive rebellion; and he had few friends. But he felt that his great work was still to be done, and he set about it with indomitable spirit. *Paradise Lost* was published in 1667, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* four years later. These poems won him some measure of immediate fame; he was visited by distinguished men, Dryden among the number; and the closing years of his life were spent quietly and happily, "in calm of mind, all passion spent." He died in 1674.

To give a detailed account of these great poems is beyond the scope of this book. They must be read by all who wish to make a serious study of the history of English literature; and, furthermore, they must be read by all who would seriously study the general history of England during this great crisis; *Paradise Lost* is not only one of the great poems of the world, it is also a great historical document, shedding a flood of light upon the age in which it was written. It is not merely a wonderful piece of narrative, such as Milton might have written if he had persevered in his early project of composing an epic about King Arthur and the Round Table; it is also the expression of a religion. In Shakespeare the one element of contemporary life of which we find no reflection is Puritanism; but in Milton's later poems the very soul of Puritanism finds a voice. In *Paradise Lost* we have the Hebrew side of Puritanism—the stern, militant, uncompromising temper of the Old Testament. In *Paradise Regained* we have the Christian side—the New Testament spirit. Both should be read if we wish to have a complete picture of Milton's mind, and the mind of Puritan England.

Many of Milton's republican friends must have fallen into despair, when they saw the ideals they had tried to force upon the nation trodden under foot by a people which seemed to have gone back to all its old idolatries. Milton saw that Puritanism was not really beaten—that its ideals would animate the nation again and change its destiny—and he took upon himself to give to those ideals a voice. So, in *Samson Agonistes*, the hero, with his eyes put out and his strength gone, seems to have fallen into the depths of helplessness, yet in the hour of his death triumphs gloriously over his enemies. There can be no doubt that Samson—blind, old, and fallen on evil days—stood in Milton's mind as a symbol of the righteous cause in defence of which he had laboured all his life long.

75. Characteristics of Milton's Poetry. Perhaps the most obvious and peculiar excellence of Milton as a poet is his unrivalled power of giving to all his conceptions a sublime and majestic utterance. "His natural port," says Dr. Johnson, "is gigantic loftiness": we need not hope to find a better description. A later critic calls him "a great artist in the grand style." It is not easy to define "the grand style," but we recognise it when we meet with it, and we meet with it in Milton from his earliest poems to his latest—from the *Nativity Ode*, where we find such lines as

> "The trumpet spake not to the armèd throng,"

down to the closing chorus of *Samson Agonistes*. Whole treatises have been written about Milton's versification; minute examination of his verse has helped to reveal the inexhaustible art whereby he has managed to give an almost infinite variety of cadence to the ten-syllabled line in which his greatest poems are written. Some eighteenth-century poets, as we shall see, slavishly imitated Milton's

diction and caught some of his mannerisms; but the real power of his writing lies far deeper than mere mannerisms; a real style cannot be borrowed, for it fits a man as closely as his skin. Milton was able to write in the grand style because his nature was grand. Somewhat cold, somewhat hard and unsympathetic as he was, a man of loftier character never walked on English earth.

76. The Cavalier Poets. Milton's greatest work was done, as we have noticed, after the Restoration, but it would have been absurd to treat it as belonging to the Restoration period: he represents one side in the great conflict of the preceding age. When we look for a corresponding expression of the aims and aspirations of the Royalist party, we find it in poetry of a very different order: in the lyrics of a number of men who may be grouped together, roughly, as the Cavalier Poets. Instead of epics of several thousand lines, these men wrote, for the most part, lyrics of a few stanzas; instead of devoting all their talents and all their energy to fitting themselves for poetic work, these men regarded verse-making as a trivial amusement for an idle hour. They were soldiers, who would have laughed at the idea of treating poetry with too much solemnity. Accordingly, instead of Milton's sustained flights, instead of his pomp and majesty of manner, the Cavalier Poets give us trifles—trifles, sometimes, of exquisite grace and lightness. The most notable names in this group are CAREW, SUCKLING, and LOVELACE. Suckling's love-lyrics and his *Ballad on a Wedding* may be taken as typical of this school on its lighter side; while Lovelace's two immortal poems—*To Lucasta on going to the Wars* and *To Althea from Prison*—show that it was possible for a writer who treated poetry without much ceremony to express real and deep passion, and to express it adequately. But such poets, as might

naturally be expected, wrote a deal of dull and uninteresting verse.

77. The Religious Lyric. Closely related to one another in point of time, and also by a real kinship of mind, are the Religious lyrists HERBERT, VAUGHAN, CRASHAW, and QUARLES. All these poets strike a devotional note not heard again in the English lyric till the days of Cowper. Quarles was one of the most voluminous writers of his time, and some of his books—notably his *Emblems*—long enjoyed an immense popularity. A more lasting fame was won by the *Temple* of George Herbert, a volume in which there are many poems of tranquil meditative beauty, though the thought is in no case very profound. More intellectual subtlety is to be found in the work of Vaughan, and a more impassioned strain of mystical ecstasy in Crashaw. All these Religious poets, however, suffer by a defect common to almost all the poets of the age—the defect of excessive ingenuity and quaintness.

78. Herrick. Robert HERRICK, who spent his youth in London in the society of Ben Jonson and his circle, and the latter part of his life as a clergyman in Devonshire, might have been included among the Religious poets or among the Cavaliers: some poems in his *Hesperides* remind us strongly of Lovelace, some poems in his *Noble Numbers* remind us no less strongly of Herbert. But Herrick is by no means an imitator. His religious verses have a strain of simple and childlike piety which is all their own; there is nothing quite like them in English poetry. His most beautiful work, however, is to be found among his non-religious lyrics, in the section called *Hesperides*. These lyrics have a freshness of spirit which carries us back to the earlier Elizabethan song-writers. Herrick's eager and innocent delight in beautiful things—in "the grace that morning meadows wear," in the gaiety

of country festivities, in violets and daffodils, and in happy human faces—and the undertone of passionate regret as he sees all these things hurrying to their inevitable end, have earned for him the charge of paganism; but his piety rings as true and honest as his frank appreciation of the good things of the earth. A fresher, clearer voice than Herrick's has never been heard in English lyric poetry.

79. The Metaphysical Poets. The epithet "metaphysical," as applied by Dr. Johnson to certain poets of the Caroline period, is not used in its present-day sense; it simply denotes a tendency towards the unnatural, in thought and expression. These poets are also called the *Concettists*,* from their fondness for *conceits*, or quaint turns of expression, based upon either a mere play on words or upon a far-fetched resemblance between things never before compared. Ingenuity with these writers took the place of real imagination, and novelty of expression was sought at the expense of truth. In the Caroline age this tendency was all but universal; we find the defect, as already noted, in the Religious poets, and even Milton is not free from it in his early poems. For instance, in the *Nativity Ode* we find—

> "So, when the sun in bed,
> Curtained with cloudy red,
> Pillows his chin upon an orient wave";

the comparison of the sun to a person in a bed with red curtains is a conceit, a far-fetched simile. The use of the simile is only justifiable when it really illustrates the subject; as used by the metaphysical poet it merely illustrates the distorted ingenuity of his mind.

The real fault of this kind of poetry is that it puts

* Italian *concetto*="a quaint notion." The habit had been especially pronounced in Italian literature.

manner above matter; it strives to give distinction to the most obvious platitude by tricking it out in a quaint and fantastic garb. This might also be accepted for a description of *Euphuism*,* and indeed the Concettists are simply Euphuists in verse. DONNE and COWLEY are generally taken as the principal examples of this tendency; but to understand to what fantastic lengths it went we have to dip into the works of their disciples—men whose work is now quite forgotten, and whose names need not be mentioned here. Their puerile quibbles, their grotesque strainings after effect, their contempt alike for clearness and for good sense, made a violent reaction inevitable.

80. Beginnings of the Reaction. The nature of the cure which Dryden and Pope applied to the irregularities and absurdities of the metaphysical school must be studied hereafter; but we may note that, even in the period of which we are now treating, voices were raised in defence of common sense. WALLER is not an important poet in himself, and is not now widely read, but he deserves to be remembered as a precursor of what we call the "Classic" school. In form he sought for neatness, precision, and regularity; in matter his ideal was clear and reasonable thought. In verses published as early as 1623 he is seen to have found a most useful instrument for the expression in verse of clear and unimpassioned thought, namely the heroic couplet—the pair of rhymed lines, with five beats in each; and he constructed his verse so that there was a distinct pause in the sense at the end of each couplet. During the whole of the eighteenth century this remained the regular form for serious verse. DENHAM, the author of a long descriptive poem entitled *Cooper's Hill* (1642), was Waller's earliest disciple; his work enjoyed for a time a great reputation, which it has long since lost. But both

* See Sec. 57

these poets are memorable because of the debt which greater successors owed to them—a debt amply acknowledged by Dryden, who wrote: "The excellence and dignity of rhyme were never fully known till Mr. Waller taught it; but this sweetness of his lyric poesy was afterwards followed in the epic by Sir John Denham." This of course is very exaggerated praise; it is quoted merely to illustrate the relation of these poets to the leaders of the "Classical" movement of the next age.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CAROLINE PERIOD

I. THE PERIOD OF CIVIL STRIFE (1625-1660)

(*b*) PROSE

81. Characteristics of Seventeenth-Century Prose. The prose-writers whom we are accustomed to think of as characteristic of the seventeenth century have certain merits and certain defects in common. We must note, first, the persistent *Latinism* of their style: their habit of constructing sentences in such a way that one could almost translate them word for word into Latin. The use, in a language almost free from inflections, of the constructions proper to an inflected tongue is a frequent cause of obscurity. Their obscurity, however, is perhaps more often due to another fault: at this time the use of the paragraph was ill understood, and these writers habitually tried to pack what ought to be a paragraph into a single sentence. Therefore a common feature of their work is the unwieldy complex sentence, trailing a huge apparatus of subordinate clauses. Finally, the influence of Euphuism is still very strong. The quest of the unexpected epithet, of the remote comparison, of the fantastic metaphor, is carried on at the expense of clearness and simplicity; the artificial graces of antithesis and alliteration are still cultivated. Ingenuity and quaintness are especially noticeable in the theological writers, of whom,

as might naturally be expected, this age of religious controversy furnishes a great many.

These writers, then, are often unreadably obscure and involved: they are not masters of the art by which calm prosaic thought can be expressed in a clear and persuasive fashion; that is to say, they are not masters of *prose.* But, to compensate for this, their prose, at its best, possesses some of the qualities of the best poetry. It is not uncommon to find them, after pages of writing more or less dull and obscure, suddenly soaring up into a region of solemn eloquence to which the prose-writers of the succeeding age hardly even attempt to ascend. We must acknowledge that these later writers, if they discovered the precious secret of a lucid prose, also lost the secret of an impassioned prose.

82. Taylor and Browne. Perhaps the best representative of seventeenth-century prose—more thoroughly representative than Milton, whose prose work has already been dealt with—is JEREMY TAYLOR, "the most eloquent of divines," as Coleridge has called him. His *Liberty of Prophesying* (1647) is a noble plea for religious toleration, fully reflecting the large charity of temper which this Royalist bishop preserved through all the heats of controversy. Taylor lives for modern readers, however, mainly by his two treatises on *Holy Living* (1650) and *Holy Dying* (1651), and by his *Sermons.* His style has been called florid and ornate, and in truth his eloquence has little enough of the severe grandeur of Milton's finest passages. His sentences are often cumbrous and awkward, and his neglect of grammar often renders him obscure. But when his subject has really inspired him he shows an unequalled command of rich and gorgeous diction; the magnificent roll of his rhythms lingers in the ear long after his thought, which is seldom very profound, has been

forgotten. SIR THOMAS BROWNE is not usually classed among the theological writers, but the most famous and popular of all his books, the *Religio Medici* (1642), is an account of his personal thoughts and feelings about religion. A man of far greater intellectual depth and subtlety than Taylor, Browne is a desultory* writer; his learning, though immense, is not systematic; neither is his thought. He is, moreover, a paradoxical† writer; his quaintness is not the mere verbal ingenuity of the Euphuist, but springs from a real singularity of mind; his ideas are never obvious—they contrast strikingly with the splendid commonplaces of Taylor. Browne is, it may also be noted, one of the most self-revealing of writers; his style reflects with wonderful fidelity the colour of his mind; almost every sentence he wrote is as unmistakably his own as if he had set some private mark upon it. Coleridge has called it a *hyperlatinistic*‡ style; but Browne's latinisms are rather of vocabulary than of syntax. His pages bristle with such coinages as "exility," "diuturnity," and the like. In spite of this mannerism—a mannerism very common in Browne's time—perhaps no man has written so much prose that has about it the inexplicable charm of poetry. If the greatness of a writer were measured by the depth of his influence on succeeding writers, then would Browne be, beyond doubt, the greatest of English artists in prose. Among his conspicuous debtors are men differing widely from one another. Johnson§ imitates, consciously or unconsciously, his graver, weightier manner; Lamb‖ continually reminds us of his delightful

* *i.e.*, a writer who "leaps from" one topic to another. (Latin, *desultor*, "a circus rider.")

† Paradox = a surprising statement opposed to opinions commonly accepted. (Greek *para*, "contrary to," and *doxa*, "opinion.")

‡ *i.e.*, "Latinistic to excess." (Greek *hyper*, "exceeding," "over-much.")

§ See Sec. 109. ‖ See Sec. 131.

eccentricities; and his brief pithy sayings find their echo in the Americans, Emerson and Thoreau.

83. History and Biography. Of one of the defects noted as characteristic of the prose of this period, EDWARD HYDE, EARL OF CLARENDON, furnishes a prime example; namely, the unwieldy structure of the sentence. Clarendon gives the impression of being capable, with a very little more trouble, of achieving the feat of writing a whole book without using a single full stop. We might imagine a huge complex sentence to be rather a difficult thing to write, but to Clarendon, and in a lesser degree to many writers of Clarendon's time, it came much easier, when a sentence was once begun, to go on than to stop. Such being the case, we need not be surprised to find Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion* somewhat difficult reading It is true that the latter part at least of this book was not written until long after the Restoration—it was not published until after its author's death—but it belongs to the period we are now dealing with. As a statesman, Clarendon moved somewhat stiffly among the butterfly courtiers of Charles II.; he represented a more serious and strenuous age; and so it is with him as a writer. His *History* is deservedly famous for its extraordinarily vivid and life-like sketches of character. His descriptions of the chief actors of the great drama, in which he had himself played a part, are certainly the most valuable part of his book.

THOMAS FULLER was a historian of a very different order. His *Church History of Britain* (1656) is not, as history, taken seriously by readers of the present day; but Fuller is one of those authors in reading whom we think far less of the subject than of the way in which it is handled. He carries quaintness to an extreme: as Lamb—to whom this very quality endeared him—very

truly says: "Such was his natural bias to conceits that I doubt not upon most occasions it would have been going out of his way to have expressed himself out of them." A later book, *The Worthies of England*, illustrates equally well his fantastic wit and his genuine humour, and serves to introduce a literary form new to English—the *short biography*. Perhaps the best specimen of seventeenth-century biography is to be found in the *Lives* (of Hooker, Donne, Herbert, and others) by ISAAK WALTON, famous as the writer of a fresh and fragrant account of rural life, *The Compleat Angler*, a book which is still popular, though it is probably more often talked about than read.

84. Character-Writing. The power of imaginative character-construction—the creative gift which Shakespeare of all men possessed in fullest measure—had vanished with the great Elizabethans; but interest in character had not vanished, and the power of *observing* character had not vanished. It was displayed in Clarendon's portraits; it was displayed in the short biographies just alluded to; and it was displayed, most of all, in a new kind of literature which was immensely popular during this period. This was the *Character*, a brief description, or rather a picture in miniature, not of an individual but of a type; not of a "Hamlet" or an "Ophelia," but of "A Poore Man" or "A Young Raw Preacher." A critic has drawn up a list of two hundred collections of *Characters* written in the seventeenth century—a fact which sufficiently attests the great popularity of this form of writing. Of the two hundred it will suffice to mention one—the *Microcosmography* (1628) of JOHN EARLE, a collection of seventy-seven sketches, most of them very short, and the longest not covering more than two pages. The character-writers, with all their faults, were not long-winded; Earle's best writing has a point and conciseness which remind us of Bacon.

His work takes two forms: first, description of men pursuing some particular avocation—as "a Cooke," "A Tobacco-seller," and so on; secondly, description of some one characteristic or "humour," as, for instance, "An Affected Man"—a string of epigrams about affectation. It will be seen that this method of character-drawing, though it has nothing in common with Shakespeare's, is not wholly unlike Ben Jonson's.* We may note in passing that the French have cultivated the character-sketch with greater success than the English. Even Earle is by no means on a level with La Bruyère. The model upon which both French and English writers worked was the Greek Theophrastus, who wrote about B.C. 300.

85. The Seventeenth-Century Romances. English prose fiction is represented during this period by innumerable examples of the *romance*† *of chivalry*, which is also known as the *heroic romance*. Modern students who dip into one of these interminable stories will be inclined to think that what was really heroic was the attempt to read them; but there is no doubt that during most of the seventeenth century, and for the first half of the eighteenth, they enjoyed an astonishing vogue. "The Heroic Romance of the Seventeenth Century," says Sir Walter Scott, "is, with few exceptions, the most dull and tedious species of composition that ever obtained temporary popularity." The characters are as monotonous as they are un-lifelike; the hero is always of superhuman courage, the heroine is always of matchless beauty and goodness. The soliloquies are interminable; there is a great deal of false sentiment, and the plot is almost invariably preposterous.

This absurd form of writing first came into England by way of translations from the French *romans à longue*

* See Sec. 68.

† For this meaning of "romance" see note to Sec. 4.

haleine—"long-winded romances"—of which perhaps the most fashionable was one entitled *Le Grand Cyrus*: but of course English imitators sprang up by scores—it is not necessary to mention names. In fact these romances need not have been mentioned here at all—for they are certainly not literature—but for the facts that their spirit passed into the drama and produced the *heroic tragedy*, which will be described shortly; and that they gave birth to some excellent satire. Addison and Steele were constantly making fun of them, even as Boileau ridiculed them in France, and Cervantes, earlier, in Spain.

86. The Literature of Thought. Incomparably the greatest English philosophic thinker of this period was Thomas HOBBES—the only one, indeed, who counts for anything in the history of thought. His most famous work is the *Leviathan* (1651), a treatise on the first principles of politics. His theories both in politics and in religion were looked upon in his own time as heretical and dangerous, and "Hobbism" was generally detested without being understood. Hobbes has now come to be recognised as one of the greatest of intellects—the founder, so far as England is concerned, of the science of psychology* and of political science. With his theories, political or psychological, we are not here concerned; but we must not omit to note that he is, in a sense, the founder of modern English prose. His writing is weighty, vigorous, and, above all, clear. Considering the abstruseness of his subjects, his lucidity is extraordinary. His influence on the next generation of prose-writers was profound.

* The science of the operations of the mind. (Greek *psyche*, "mind" or "soul.")

CHAPTER XIV

THE CAROLINE PERIOD

II. RESTORATION PERIOD (1660-1700)

(*a*) VERSE, AND THE DRAMA

87. Classicism and Romanticism. The Restoration marks a real epoch in English literature; after that event our literature is, for more than a hundred years, a *classical* as opposed to a *romantic* literature. But these words, "classic" and "romantic," are used very vaguely and in a multitude of different senses; and it is all-important, at this point, that we should know precisely what we mean when we say, for instance, that Spenser is a romantic poet, that Pope is a classical poet, and that Keats, again, is a romantic poet. When a person speaks of "the classical writers" he may be referring indiscriminately to the writers of ancient Greece and Rome; or he may mean the writers, of any age and of any tongue, whose works are ranked among the indisputable masterpieces of literature; or, again, he may possibly be referring to one definite school of modern writers which has claimed the name. Similarly the word "romance" will suggest to some minds the metrical narratives of mediæval times; to others it stands merely for story-telling in general; while others, again, will think of it as denoting a certain attitude of mind, or a certain quality in events and places and persons, as when we speak of a "romantic valley" or a "romantic young man."

During the forty years between the Restoration and the end of the century, a definite change is seen to have come over the spirit of English literature. But this literary phenomenon is merely the symptom of a change which came over the whole spirit of European thought; and fully to describe that change—to trace it to its obscure causes and to follow it to its far-reaching consequences—would require more than a few sentences; would require, indeed, the whole of a book very much longer than this one. But perhaps it is possible to convey in a brief space some idea of the main features of the change.

(1) To a certain extent, *classicism* implies, as its name suggests, the influence of the classics of Greece and Rome. As a matter of fact it is almost solely the Latin influence that we can trace in the "classical" literature of England and France; the greater Greek masters (despite Pope's very free translations) are but ill understood. The writers of epic and pastoral poetry imitate Vergil; the lyric poets imitate Horace; the satirists imitate Horace and Juvenal; the preachers imitate Cicero; the dramatists imitate Seneca in tragedy, and in comedy Terence and Plautus. The imitation is often far enough in spirit from the original; but the imitative spirit is always present. Classicism, then, is based on tradition. The romantic writer seeks as far as possible to put his thought into a new form, to fashion for himself a new instrument of expression; the "classical" writer thinks it more important to have a good model, and to mould one's work upon that model as exactly as may be.

(2) It is going a little nearer to the root of the matter to say that classicism means the application of *rules* to literature. These rules were deduced, or were supposed to be deduced, from the practice of "the ancients"; in many cases the ancients would have stared if they could have

seen the deductions. The most famous example is to be found in the *dramatic unities** for which Aristotle was made responsible. Without referring to particular rules, however, we may note in general that the "classical" idea of literary greatness was the idea of obedience to rule. It was assumed that for every form of writing—essay, poem, drama, and so on—there were certain fixed rules which could be easily ascertained and summarily stated, and disregard of which made good work impossible. The "classical" critics never properly appreciated Shakespeare; he seemed to them to have violated the fundamental laws of the drama. In like manner, Addison's famous criticism of *Paradise Lost* is mainly concerned to show that Milton was a great poet because he observed all the rules of the epic.

No one doubts that literature, like every other art, has its laws; that if you set out to create a thing of beauty you must obey the laws of beauty. But the attempt to state those laws in formulæ which satisfy the logical intellect has always broken down. If we lay down a set of arbitrary rules to govern, let us say, the writing of essays, we may be sure that the next essayist of genius will break them all with the utmost unconcern. We must remember, however, that in this respect classicism was the natural reaction against the wild extravagances of men who, in asserting their right to express themselves as they pleased, forgot alike good taste and good sense. A modern poet, who is also a critic,† has described the age of Pope as a period

> "When rhyming turn'd from freedom to the schools,
> And, shock'd with License, shudder'd into Rules."

(3) But we cannot really understand classicism until we see it has the product of the new spirit which, among the

* See Sec. 64. † Austin Dobson.

nations of Western Europe, had ever since the Renaissance been slowly but surely making its way into every region of mental activity—into politics, and religion, and art, and social life; a new way of looking at things, a new attitude towards life and the world. It is difficult to find a precise name for this attitude. It may be called the *scientific spirit*; it may be called the *critical spirit*; or, best of all, we may call it the *spirit of rationalism.* What we name the classical period in literature has also been named, without special reference to literature, the Age of Reason.

The characteristic tendency of this age was to bring everything to the test of the logical faculty. Clearness and definiteness became the sole test of truth. In literature men sought, above all things, for logical arrangement of parts and perfect lucidity in detail. Everything must be painted with clear definite outline, with no vagueness, no mystery, no half-lights. Literature became unimaginative and unimpassioned.

As might naturally be expected, the writers of this period did excellent work in the reform of prose; for in prose, logical arrangement and lucidity count for a great deal. But when we come to poetry it is another matter. Without passion, without imagination, without the sense of mystery, poetry in the highest sense cannot exist. The age of classicism bequeathed to us some admirable and delightful masterpieces in prose, but it was almost absolutely sterile of real poetry.

88. Classicism in Verse. We must note, briefly, some of the obvious characteristics of the verse written during the Age of Reason—the period extending from the Restoration to the French Revolution. It must be clearly understood that what follows merely describes general tendencies, and that there are many and notable exceptions to every general statement here made.

(1) The poets of this period, with their cool, dispassionate, lucid intellects, fail hopelessly when they essay to deal with the great deep joys and sorrows and hopes and fears of humanity. The passion of the lover, the passion of the patriot, the passion of the martyr—the joy of combat, the sadness of baffled endeavour—the mystery of life, the mystery of death, the fear of God, the hope of immortality—these are the themes round which the greatest poetry of all times is woven; and they are themes which cannot be handled by dry and unimaginative minds. The poets of this age could not sing of the great passions. The only passion that moves them is a passion for clearness, for definiteness, for logic. The few love-lyrics of the time are the most frigid and unreal in the language. (2) Sympathy with Nature, with the non-human world—which is of the essence of romantic poetry—does not spring from the logical faculty, and is therefore not cultivated during the Age of Reason. The waterfall which haunted Wordsworth "like a passion" would have stirred no emotion in the bosom of Dryden or of Pope, so far as we can judge by their verse. The "classical" poets often speak, indeed, of mountains and valleys and flowers and birds, but always in cold and conventional phrases which have no real feeling in them. These poets do not give us the impression of having taken a real interest in such things. (3) The delight in beautiful things, which we commonly associate with the poetic nature, rarely finds expression in the verse of this period. What Milton wrote in his blindness proves convincingly enough that he had once had eyes and had used them to some purpose; there is hardly a line in Dryden to prove that he had not been born blind. There is not a line in Pope to prove that he had ever been stirred by the loveliness of a human face, of a natural scene, or of a work of art. (4) And if nature lay outside

the province of these men's verse, so did the kind of life which brings men closest to nature. The "classical" poetry is an urban poetry; it was written for the most part by men who lived in London, and it reflects a city life. When they said the proper study of mankind was man, they did not mean to include the peasant. The man they portray is the well-bred "man about town." (5) We have called them ignorant of the great passions, but we must note one exception. The passion of *hatred* they knew how to express with unrivalled vigour; the satires of this period throw all other English satires into the shade. The corner of life to which their vision was limited—the city life of their time—offered plenty of follies and foibles for satiric treatment; and the kind of verse they wrote best—verse full of wit, elegance, point, and neatness—was a perfect instrument of ridicule.

So much for the *matter* of this poetry: as to its *manner*, one point must be noted. Probably the first thing that strikes anyone who begins to study the verse of this period is the extraordinary sameness of it, the extraordinary likeness of each man's work to everybody else's. Read in succession half-a-dozen of the poems generally regarded as representative of the epoch: they may have been written by very different men, about very different subjects, at long intervals of time; nevertheless, in all of them you seem to hear the same voice speaking in the same tones. A French critic * has said of these poets that "whoever knows one knows all the others"; that is certainly an exaggeration, but the general uniformity of tone is too striking to be missed by any reader. And the cause of this uniformity is also obvious: when you have a number of writers pursuing the same ideal, copying the same models, observing the same rules, you are bound to have something of

* Taine.

uniformity in the result. The poets of this period did not aim at expressing the delicate shades of individual feeling: they sought to speak in the language of "good sense," which is the same for all minds. Their purpose was to write "correctly," and they thought there was but one "correct" manner, which every poet should try to cultivate. The difference between the style which aims at correctness and the style which aims at the expression of the individual temperament will be very vividly felt by anyone who reads a few pages of Pope and immediately afterwards dips into Browning.

And this uniformity is not solely a matter of general tone; it extends to minute particulars. One metre, as we have already remarked—the heroic couplet,—became the normal form for all verse of serious intention, and remained so for more than a century.* We must not imagine that the heroic couplet was the invention of the classicists: it was in this metre that Chaucer wrote the *Canterbury Tales.* It is in their method of handling the metre—a point to which we must refer later on—that the resemblances of these poets are so striking and, in the end, so wearisome. But, more important still, we must note the uniformity of *diction.* These writers believed that there was a language proper to poetry, and quite different from the language of prose; and they carried this belief—which has undeniable elements of truth in it—so far as to set up an unnatural jargon known as "poetic diction." In this language the sea is usually the "azure main," the fields are "dewy meads," every young woman is a "nymph," and every young man a "swain."

89. The Development of Classicism. During the reign of Charles II., France was the leading European power; and England was bound to her by the closest political ties.

* See Sec. 80.

Charles himself was at least half a Frenchman by birth, character, and education; and the tone of his court, and of the aristocracy in general during his reign, was French. French manners were widely copied; the French language was widely spoken in England. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the literature of France exerted a profound influence on every form of English writing during the Restoration period. That influence was the most powerful factor in the making of the classical style, in prose and in verse.

But the classical style, as we have just described it, does not reach its full development in the Restoration period. It is only during the succeeding period that it blossoms in its full perfection of wit and polish, of neatness and conciseness, of elegance and "correctness." Dryden and his contemporaries are often mutinous under restraint, often show a tendency to disregard rules and regulations, sometimes even show flashes of the old Elizabethan fire. They have too much rude vigour to be perfectly classical. They are seen pressing forward to the new realms of which Pope and the men of his time were to take possession.

90. Dryden's Verse. In the many-sided work of John DRYDEN (1631-1700) it is possible to study all the main literary tendencies of his time; he is the one thoroughly typical man of letters of the Restoration period, which is sometimes called the Age of Dryden. His plays will be dealt with in a subsequent section, his prose in a subsequent chapter; let us here consider his work in verse.

Dryden began as a "metaphysical"* poet; the elegiac verses on Lord Hastings, who had died of the small-pox, have been described as more unpleasant than the disease—they handle its most repellent features with an ingenuity of illustration which Donne might have envied. But Dryden

* See Sec. 79.

soon abandoned this fantastic style. In the *Astræa Redux*—in which he celebrated the Restoration—we find him using the heroic couplet, though not yet with complete mastery. In the *Annus Mirabilis*—written in the four-lined stanza of Gray's *Elegy*—he first displays his masculine sense and his massive energy of style. For the next fourteen years he devoted himself almost exclusively to the drama; but in 1681 he turned to political satire, and produced *Absalom and Achitophel*—the only work by Dryden which can be called quite first-rate of its kind. This famous poem was a savage attack—in the guise of a Biblical narrative—on Lord Shaftesbury, then lying in the Tower awaiting his trial. The poem made a great sensation; but Shaftesbury was acquitted, and a medal was struck to celebrate his escape. This furnished material for a second satire—*The Medal* (1682)—which brought forth some virulent replies, notably one by Shadwell that especially irritated Dryden. He pilloried his opponent in *MacFlecknoe*, a literary satire in which Shadwell is treated as the poetical son of Flecknoe, an inferior Irish versifier recently dead. A second part of *Absalom and Achitophel* also appeared, but of this poem all except one short passage was by another hand.

Whatever popularity Dryden's work as a poet still retains—it is probably not very much—is due to these satires, and especially to the first of them. The descriptions of Shaftesbury and of Buckingham are masterpieces of hostile portrait-painting, and the athletic energy of Dryden's style is nowhere shown to better advantage. Not so successful were his attempts to use verse for the purpose of religious argument. The *Religio Laici*—a defence of the Church of England—and the *Hind and the Panther*—a defence of the Church of Rome—are not interesting to readers of the present day, though in his

own time they were almost as popular as his satires. The latter of the two has passages of great vigour, but its complicated allegorical form makes it wearisome to readers of the present time, who are not interested in the argument.

Nothing need here be said of Dryden's modernisations of Chaucer; of his versified tales from Boccaccio; or of his vigorous translations of Virgil, Juvenal, and other Latin poets. But a little space must be spared for mention of his famous lyrics, the *Ode for St. Cecilia's Day* and *Alexander's Feast.* The second and more celebrated ode is justly admired, though it is safe to say that no one has ever been very deeply moved by its hard rhetorical brilliance. Its music is the music of a brass band; it is wholly lacking in the tender and inexplicable charm of genuine poetry. It is chiefly noticeable as the most successful example of the "Pindaric Ode"—a name given, through a misunderstanding of the Greek poet Pindar's principles of versification, to any poem written in lines of irregular length. This form of ode had already been made fashionable by Cowley, and it remained, through almost the whole of the eighteenth century, the principal recreation for those who were weary of writing in the heroic couplet.

It was, however, in polishing the heroic couplet, and in making it a thoroughly efficient instrument of satire, that Dryden's real triumph was won. It is true that he never learned to manage the couplet with the exquisite ease and finish of Pope, who comes nearer to the classical ideal of verse-writing. But if there is less of artifice in Dryden's verse there is far more of natural vigour. His couplet has been well described by Gray as

> "Two coursers of ethereal race,
> With necks in thunder cloath'd, and long-resounding pace."

Pope, if we may use the same metaphor, drives a more docile pair, more completely broken-in to double harness;

but they do not strike us as fiery-mettled animals; we never suspect them of any desire to break into a gallop.

91. Butler. The reaction against Puritanism finds its clearest expression in the comic drama of the Restoration; but we must not omit to mention the famous lampoon in verse, of which the direct purpose was to hold up to ridicule the principles and persons of the defeated party. *Hudibras* (1663) was the work of a surly royalist, Samuel BUTLER, who suffered in obscurity during the Commonwealth, and took ample vengeance when the Restoration set him free to say the thing he would. The satire—little read to-day—was the delight of Charles II. and of the Court party in general; and the popularity it achieved is easily understood. All the accumulated bitterness of feeling which the austere rule of the Puritans had engendered finds a fitting utterance in Butler's portrait of the sour Presbyterian knight, Sir Hudibras; and the knight's adventures are told in bright and vigorous language. Sir Hudibras is accompanied in his wanderings by his squire, Ralpho, just as Don Quixote is accompanied by Sancho Panza; and indeed the poem is everywhere reminiscent of Cervantes' masterpiece; but there is distinct originality in Butler's adaptation of his metre—the eight-syllable couplet—to the purposes of ridicule. By his dexterous handling of this easy-running measure he became the model for various succeeding verse-wrights, notably Swift and Prior, who excelled in *Hudibrastics*, as the manner came to be called. Butler was neither a humourist nor a poet, but he had great wit and great ingenuity; he was one of the first English writers to cultivate successfully the *mock-heroic* treatment of a subject; he did much to introduce into English verse the *familiar* style; and he is one of the few poets who give pleasure by the grotesque ingenuity of their rhymes.

THE DRAMA.

92. Tragedy. A very definite historic event separates the drama of the Restoration from the Elizabethan drama. In 1642 the Puritans closed the theatres; and, though there were secret performances, for the next eighteen years the playwright was practically silent. The Restoration brought about a state of things peculiarly favourable to the drama: the King, his Court, and the nation generally, clamoured for amusement; and the theatre became more popular than it had ever been. But a new England demanded a new drama. As we have seen, the life had gone out of the old drama even before the Puritan ordinance; and the witty and frivolous England of Charles II. demanded an entirely different form oı entertainment from that which had been provided by Shakespeare and Webster.

One of the new forms is that known as the *heroic play*; and here, again, Dryden's work is representative; when we have studied his *Indian Emperor* (1665), or his *Aurengzebe* (1675), we know the main characteristics of this dramatic form. The heroic play is really the heroic romance, already spoken of,* translated into verse—into rhymed verse for the most part—and put upon the stage with gorgeous scenic accompaniment. Its subject is usually Oriental, Moorish, or Mexican, and thus lends itself to pageantry; and its hero is a dark and passionate being who is perpetually mouthing great speeches. The incurable fault of the heroic play is its tendency to rant, to bombast; the playwright aims at magnificence and achieves only magniloquence. There is no truth to human nature in the characters or the actions; there is little but empty and extravagant declamation. A witty

* See Sec. 85.

burlesque—*The Rehearsal* (1671)—written by the Duke of Buckingham and his friends, and put upon the stage at the moment when the heroic play was at the height of its popularity, cast well-deserved ridicule upon this species of composition, and in particular upon Dryden's plays.

The rhymed tragedy was immensely popular for a time; but its vogue did not last. About 1678 Dryden abandoned rhyme in favour of blank verse; and he was followed by LEE and OTWAY. In the work of Otway at least there are hints of the real tragic imagination; his *Venice Preserved* (1682) is decidedly the greatest English tragedy since the days of the greater Elizabethans. Some of Dryden's blank-verse tragedies are adaptations of Shakespeare—*All for Love*, for instance, is his version of *Antony and Cleopatra*; and we can learn a great deal about the taste of the time by studying the changes which Dryden thought it necessary to make in order to suit Shakespeare to the taste of a later generation.

93. Comedy. The reaction against Puritanism, as we have said, found its clearest expression in the comic drama of the Restoration; and the Restoration comedy stands by itself in the history of the English drama: it resembles its predecessors as little as its successors. The influence of France is here conspicuous; all the writers we are about to mention were unblushing borrowers from Molière, and from other and lesser masters of French comedy.

Dryden, though he wrote a great number of comedies, had little of the true comic force. He followed the tradition of Jonson, putting "humours" upon the stage instead of humorously-conceived characters. The real representatives of Restoration comedy are WYCHERLEY and CONGREVE; Etherege, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar are minor members of the same group. It is not necessary to describe the work of these different writers in detail.

Congreve is by far the greatest of them all in the truly French qualities of wit and precision in the dialogue; Wycherley's satire is perhaps more broadly effective, and he shows a greater knowledge of stage-effect. But there is little to choose between them in one respect: the genial humour, the pleasant pastoral fancies of the Elizabethans have disappeared, and in their place has come an intolerably coarse, hard, and heartless, though extremely witty, derision of contemporary society. This derision is not that of men who are lifted by their own moral ideals above the society they ridicule, but of cynics who dwell contentedly in its midst.

In its first delighted sense of freedom from Cromwellian bonds, the nation flung itself into all sorts of mad excesses; but a counter-reaction was bound to come, for England has always been Puritan at heart. The better sense of the people found a voice in a trenchant pamphlet entitled *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698). This famous piece of invective was written by a clergyman, Jeremy COLLIER, who deserves to rank with the great controversialists by reason of his ready wit and merciless logic. Congreve's reply was ill-tempered and pointless; Wycherley and Vanbrugh retorted savagely; Dryden alone took the dignified and manly course—he admitted that Collier's argument was unanswerable, his accusation just. "If he be my enemy, let him triumph; if he be my friend, as I have given him no personal occasion to be otherwise, he will be glad of my repentance. It becomes me not to draw my pen in the defence of a bad cause, when I have so often drawn it for a good one."

The Restoration comedy never really lifted its head after this controversy. It was succeeded by the *sentimental comedy*, which, though mawkish and insincere, was at least decent. This, however, belongs to a later chapter.

CHAPTER XV

The Caroline Period

II. Restoration Period (1660-1700)

(*b*) PROSE

94. Bunyan. The development of English prose during this prosaic period is most interesting; but there are few very interesting individual writers, few who are still read by those who are not students of literary history. And the one writer whose work is still as widely popular as ever it was is one who stands apart from the main stream of literary progress. Bunyan had no influence on the prose-writers of his own or the next generation, for they did not read him. Nor was his own prose influenced by that of his contemporaries, for he did not read them. His style—simple, natural, unadorned, and vigorous—was based in part on the nobly simple style of the *Authorised Version* of the Bible, and in part on the direct and homely manner of ordinary conversation.

John Bunyan was at the date of the Restoration a Baptist preacher, already famous among those of his own sect; and, as a Nonconformist who refused to abstain from preaching, he was for twelve years confined in a prison. It was during this enforced leisure that his principal books were written. We need name only two—*Grace Abounding* (1666), an account of his religious experiences,—of his early sins, his agonies of doubt and repentance, his final conversion; and the immortal allegory

of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), an autobiography in a different form. There is little need to describe this great book, for it is well-nigh universally known; it is one of the world's classics. Bunyan is the greatest of all allegorical * writers, not only because, as Macaulay says, "his mind was so imaginative that personifications, when he dealt with them, became men"; not only because he can depict a type of character or relate an incident by a few vivid touches which reveal the born story-teller, but also, and mainly, because he accomplishes supremely well the real purpose of the allegorist, and makes his stories both interesting in themselves and interesting as expressions of a spiritual truth. We are enthralled by Christian's adventures, merely as a story; but we are never for a moment allowed to lose sight of the fact that it is the story of a soul, its doubts and fears, its agonies and its triumph.

95. Dryden's Prose. Dryden's work in prose is very apt to be underrated, for the reason that he wrote not a single volume, in prose, on any subject likely to interest the general world of readers. His prose writings took the form, for the most part, of prefaces to his plays; his one separate publication, the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668), deals with such questions as the relative value of rhyme and blank verse in tragedy—a technical question about which the world at large could scarcely be expected to care very keenly. But to us, who are seeking to trace the development of English prose, Dryden's achievement cannot but seem to be of the first importance. To begin with, he was the real founder of modern literary criticism. In his prefaces we find the first attempt to look dispassionately at literature as an art, to compare the various literary forms, to get at the principles of each form, and to find out wherein consists the greatness of the world's

* See note to Sec. 24.

masterpieces in each form. His judgments of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton, for example, warped as they are by his excessive reverence for French rules and formulæ, have more genuine critical insight than is displayed by any of his successors up to the time of Gray.

But it is by the *form*, even more than by the matter, of his criticisms that Dryden commands attention. He is not only the father of modern criticism, he is the father of modern prose. "Here at last," exclaims Matthew Arnold, after quoting a sentence from Dryden, "we have the true English prose, a prose such as we would all gladly use if we knew how." The pedantic Latinisms, the lumbering sentences, the uncertain grammar, all are gone; we have in place of these a prose which is brief, clear, incisive, and yet graceful and harmonious; a prose which has the force and animation of the best talk, refined and polished by deliberate art.

96. Theology and Philosophy. The spirit of rationalism * invaded the realm of theological thought as it invaded every other region of intellectual activity: we note in the works of the popular theologians of the time a new endeavour to bring every belief to the test of reason—to defend religion by showing how *reasonable* it is. We are not here concerned, however, with theological arguments, but with literature; it must suffice to note that such men as TILLOTSON, BARROW, and SOUTH appealed, by their published volumes of sermons, which were very popular, to a wide audience never reached by Dryden, and so helped to spread the influence of the new prose, the prose of logic and lucidity. To the style of Tillotson, indeed, Dryden himself owned his indebtedness.

Philosophy is represented by the great name of John LOCKE, whose *Essay concerning the Human Understanding*

* See p. 114.

(1690) marks an epoch in the history of thought. In this book he endeavours to make a complete survey of the human mind, to give a full account of how the mind works. He declares that there is no such thing as "innate ideas," that all we know and all we believe comes to us from experience. During the whole of the eighteenth century the influence of Locke was immense, both in France and in England: the two great English philosophers of that period, Berkeley and Hume, are in a sense his disciples. In a history of philosophy many pages must be devoted to Locke; in a history of literature a brief notice is sufficient. As a writer, he can hardly be called attractive; he has a plain, dull, uninspired manner. His great fame is entirely due to the revolutionary nature of his thought; the expression of it is in no way remarkable.

97. Miscellaneous Prose. To this period belong two great diaries, which were not, however, given to the world till early in the nineteenth century—the diaries of EVELYN and PEPYS. Evelyn was the author of many books, and seems to have been a most amiable and respectable character; Pepys was the reverse of respectable, but he is one of the most delightful of egoists, and his book—written in cipher, and probably not intended for publication—is a masterpiece of frank and artless self-revelation. Sir William TEMPLE had in his own time an immense reputation, both in literature and in politics; but in neither sphere was his achievement really noteworthy. In his *Essays* (1692) he shows himself able to enunciate a platitude with a well-bred ease, a kind of stately yet playful familiarity, which marks him as a precursor of Addison and Steele; but beyond the circle of the obvious he never sought to stray. Gilbert BURNET, Bishop of Salisbury, bore a conspicuous part in the greatest public events of the period; his most famous book, the *History of My*

Own Time, published after his death, is a volume of memoirs rather than a history. An acrimonious discussion about certain spurious letters, attributed to Phalaris, an ancient Greek prince of Sicily, made a great noise during the last five years of the century, but is now only remembered because it called into the field Richard BENTLEY, who proved himself a consummate controversialist, and who must always rank with the world's greatest masters of classical scholarship.

98. Summary of Caroline Age (1625-1700):—

PROSE	POETRY.	DRAMA.
	1629. Milton's *Nativity Ode*	
1642. Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*		
1644. Milton's *Areopagitica*		
	1645. Waller's *Poems*	
1647. Jeremy Taylor's *Liberty of Prophesying*		
1653. Walton's *Compleat Angler*		
	1663. Butler's *Hudibras*	
		1664. Etherege's first play
	1667. Milton's *Paradise Lost*; Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis*	
		1672. Wycherley's first play
1678. Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*		
	1681. Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*	
1690. Locke's *Essay*		
		1693. Congreve's first play
		1697. Vanbrugh's first play
		1698. Collier's attack on the Stage

CHAPTER XVI

The Augustan Age (1700-1745)

(*a*) verse, and the drama

99. Alexander Pope. We have already described, in outline, the ideals of classicism in verse; it is in the verse of Pope that those ideals find their fullest realisation. We need not linger over the story of his life, which is largely a record of quarrels; nor over his personal character, which, even his most fervent admirers must admit, had many unpleasing traits. He was a brilliantly precocious youth: his *Pastorals* were written, according to his own account, in his sixteenth year; in such matters, however, his own account was not always trustworthy. This work, though tame and conventional enough, was received with loud applause; it was supposed to be in the Virgilian manner. In the *Messiah*, an avowed imitation of Virgil's Fourth Eclogue, and in the bucolic parts of *Windsor Forest*, Pope continued along the same line. No one now imagines that to sing of how "blushing Flora paints th' enamelled ground," is to sing in Virgil's manner, but Pope thought so. It is important to note that in this "pastoral" period Pope formed his diction, and that he believed that diction to be based on the best traditions of classical poetry.

In 1711 he published his first attempt at didactic poetry, the famous *Essay on Criticism*. In this work, which is certainly a wonderful performance for a young man of twenty-one, he attempts to do for English literature

what Boileau had, with better success, attempted to do for French. Most readers will agree that the *Essay* is not poetry in any high sense of that term; with regard to its value as criticism there has been much disagreement, but it is safe to say that, whatever value Pope's critical dicta may possess, the credit does not belong to him; there is not an original thought in the whole poem. Yet it deserves study, for it, better than any other English work, helps us to understand what it was that the "Augustan" poets were really aiming at. In this poem, also, we note the first appearance of a new element in Pope's style—the epigrammatic. There are many lines and couplets so felicitously written that they have become proverbial commonplaces, such as

> "To err is human; to forgive, divine";
> "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread";
> "A little learning is a dang'rous thing":

and the like.

The Rape of the Lock * was published in its earliest form in 1712; it was afterwards much enlarged and greatly improved. In its final form it is undoubtedly Pope's most successful work; nowhere else is his manner so entirely adequate to the matter. It is the lightest of satires, the daintiest of trifles; exquisitely artificial and completely unimpassioned, it exactly catches the frivolous courtly tone of the society it depicts. Where his subject requires thinking, Pope is apt to be commonplace and incoherent; where it calls for feeling and imagination, he is apt to be tame and insincere. Here, all that is demanded is a brilliant and sparkling gaiety and a delicate irony, and Pope rises to the occasion with triumphant success. This

* This title means "the cutting off of the curl of hair"; referring to the central incident of the poem.

essay in the mock-heroic manner is *the* representative poem of the Augustan age.

The first volume of Pope's translation of the *Iliad* of Homer was published in 1715, the last in 1720. By this great work Pope made himself both famous and, if not wealthy, at least free from cares about money. It was hailed with rapturous delight by all but a few malignant enemies, who did not attack, because they could not see, its real weakness. Pope, it is true, was a poor Greek scholar, but the fundamental defects of his *Iliad* are due, not to his defective scholarship, but to the fact that he lived when he did. Neither those who admired Pope's version nor those who professed to despise it had ever really *heard* the "strong-winged" music of Homer. The grand roll of the hexameter has nothing in common with the mincing neatness of the heroic couplet; the large simplicity and directness of the ancient epic had nothing to do with the polished "correctness" and elaboration of the Augustans. Matthew Arnold's sentence may be quoted: "Between Pope and Homer there is interposed the mist of Pope's literary artificial manner, entirely alien to the plain naturalness of Homer's manner." It is chiefly by the tinsel additions which Pope makes to Homer's words that Homer is spoiled.

In Pope's satires—of which the *Dunciad* (1728) is the bulkiest and most ambitious, the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* perhaps the most delightful example—we find the epigrammatic point and neatness which have been already noted in the *Essay on Criticism*, along with the more masterly handling of the familiar and colloquial style. Pope is our greatest master of all the resources of ridicule; he can pass from light and delicate banter to scathing invective; his style is supple and flexible. If the great purpose of satire is to make your victim wince, there can

be no doubt of Pope's greatness; none of his enemies was so thick-skinned but his shaft penetrated. Dryden, with all his force, could not manage that polite, well-bred contempt which is the most galling of all. But in one important respect Dryden is the greater satirist; he conveys the impression of being impersonal and disinterested. When he attacks Shaftesbury or Buckingham, you feel that he is attacking what he conceives to be abominable to God and man; when Pope attacks Theobald or Cibber, you feel that he is attacking what is abominable to Alexander Pope. So it comes about that Dryden's most effective portraits are of men who played a memorable part in English history, while Pope's are of men who would have long since been forgotten if he had not himself given them a hateful immortality. The one exception is Addison, whom Pope described in lines which admittedly reach the high-water mark of English satire.

Of Pope's experiments in versified philosophy—the *Essay on Man* (1733-34) may be studied as a typical example—little need be said. Pope was always an extremely shallow thinker, and he was always an unblushing borrower. There is much vigorous rhetoric in the *Essay*, and there are many neat apophthegms which have become household quotations; but its plan is radically bad; it is simply a collection of odds and ends of superficial philosophy picked up, some from books and some from the conversation of Pope's friend, Bolingbroke. Pope's philosophy is full of the most ludicrous inconsistencies, but these, after all, matter little, for none of his thoughts have any original value. Of the real philosophic mind—the mind which seeks to penetrate beneath the surfaces of things—Pope had no trace. That his philosophic poems should have gained such an immense contemporary fame

simply shows that the discussion of highly abstract questions was a fashionable foible of the times, and that the great majority of those who dabbled in philosophy were equipped for the task neither by temper nor by training.

100. The Familiar Style. In Pope's poetry, and especially in his satires, we note that the dignified heroic metre is lightened by an infusion of popular idiom—the idiom of ordinary conversation. One example is worth much disquisition; take almost any couplet from the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*:

> "The piece, you think, is incorrect; why, take it;
> I'm all submission; what you'd have it, make it."

That is the familiar style; and of those who, in the Augustan period, cultivated the familiar style, we must be content to mention three. Jonathan SWIFT will be dealt with more fully when we come to speak of the prose of the period. Swift can hardly be said to have aimed at writing poetry, or even the rhetorical verse which in those days passed for poetry. In his youth, indeed, he so far misunderstood his own powers as to write dull "Pindaric" odes;* one of his early compositions was shown to Dryden, whose comment was: "Cousin Swift, you will never be a poet," and a poet he never was; but he managed to form for himself a style of verse which admirably expressed his fierce and bitter and scornful spirit. His favourite metre is the octosyllabic couplet of *Hudibras*, but his manner is much more concise and trenchant than Butler's. In his verse, as in his prose, it is easy to see that he loved simplicity and clearness, hated ornament, and despised elevated diction. The diction of his verse is, in truth, the diction of his prose. The *Verses*

* See p. 120.

on my Own Death are a capital example both of Swift's biting irony and of the familiar style at its best. Matthew PRIOR wrote much, and in many diverse manners, but he lives by what he wrote in the familiar style. His *Alma* is an avowed imitation of *Hudibras*, and he wrote many *fables* and short tales in verse, all stamped with the same qualities of lightness and ease. Prior, however, is seen to best advantage in his lyrics, which have the Horatian virtues of felicity and charm, and seeming-careless grace. John GAY, the familiar friend of Swift and of Pope, was another accomplished master of the art of light verse. His most popular work was a collection of *Fables*, in which the handling is often as dexterous as the moral is invariably obvious and trite. Much more poetically important is his *Trivia*, a charming mock-heroic account of the streets of London.

101. Miscellaneous Verse. During the first half of the eighteenth century literature was used, to an extent unknown before or since, as an instrument of party politics. Political strife has produced some admirable controversial prose, but it is safe to say that the warfare of Whig and Tory has never inspired a great poem. The vast mass of political verse belonging to this period is now deservedly neglected. It took two forms—attack and defence; satire and panegyric. The satire was for the most part brutal and violent; the panegyrical verse was incredibly fulsome. No flattery was too gross for the purposes of party. The one panegyrical poem of the time which is still read is the *Campaign*, written to celebrate Marlborough's victory at Blenheim; and it is read, not because it is worth reading, but because it was the work which first brought into public notice the ability of Joseph ADDISON, whose real genius was for prose, and whose real work will be dealt with presently. Prior's various odes to King William are more

skilful and perhaps more sincere than most poems of the class.

102. Thomson. The triumph of classicism was never so complete in England as it was in France. Even during the Augustan age an anti-classical element was dimly discernible. Two years before the appearance of the *Dunciad*, a young Scotchman, James THOMSON, had sounded, not very loudly, a note of revolt. Thomson was the author of that popular piece of spirited rhetoric, *Rule Britannia*; but his importance in literary history rests on his *Seasons* (the first part of which, *Winter*, appeared in 1726), and on his *Castle of Indolence.* Thomson is sometimes treated as a philosophic poet of the school of Pope, and he himself probably thought of the *Seasons* as a poetic expression of what was called "natural religion"; in the moralisings, of which the poem is full, he is entirely the child of his time. But it is better to regard him as the first stammering representative of the poetry of natural description. His attitude to nature is not Wordsworth's, but it is nearer to Wordsworth's than to Pope's.* *The Seasons* is full of good first-hand observation of natural objects, and of warm and sincere feeling inspired by rural scenes. In this he is obviously a rebel against classical conventions, and it was appropriate that he should also rebel against the heroic couplet. The *Castle* is written in the Spenserian stanza—a half-forgotten form which he did well to revive—and the *Seasons* in blank verse. Nothing could be more perverse than Dr. Johnson's statement that "Thomson's numbers, his pauses, his diction, are of his own growth, without transcription, without imitation." On the contrary, no one can read ten lines of the *Seasons* without perceiving that "numbers, pauses, and diction" are all highly reminiscent of Milton, and no one can read

* See Sect. 8. Also Chap. XX.

a stanza of the *Castle* without discerning a close and conscious imitation of Spenser.

Thomson had many disciples. Between 1740 and 1745 there appeared three long blank-verse poems, all showing clear traces of his influence: Akenside's *Pleasures of the Imagination*, Blair's *Grave*, and (most popular of all) Young's *Night Thoughts*. It seems probable that but for Thomson's example all these poems would have been written in rhyme instead of in Miltonic unrhymed verse.

But we must not make too much of the mere abandonment of the heroic couplet. In Thomson and his disciples the worst faults of the classical "poetic diction" may be studied better than in Pope. The tendency to personify abstractions by the easy device of capital letters runs riot in them; there is persistent Latinism, both of construction and vocabulary; inversion, or the arrangement of words in an unnatural order, is wearisomely common; and worst of all is the constant trick of *periphrasis*—the describing of an object without directly naming it.* None of these

* One example of each of these mannerisms may be given :—

PERSONIFICATION:

"While Autumn, nodding o'er the yellow plain,
Comes jovial on." (*Thomson.*)

LATINISM OF CONSTRUCTION:

" . . . Bids his driving sleets
Deform the day delightless." (*Thomson.*)

LATINISM OF VOCABULARY:

"And, softly shaking on the dimpled pool
Prelusive drops, let all their moisture flow
In large effusion, o'er the freshened world." (*Thomson.*)

INVERSION:

"Like a fall'n cedar, far-diffused his train,
Cased in green scale, the crocodile extends." (*Thomson.*)

PERIPHRASIS:

"The plumy people" for *birds*—(*Thomson*); "the sight-invigorating tube" for the *telescope*—(*Blair*); "the blue profound" for the *sky*—(*Akenside*); "the feathered tribes domestic" for *poultry*—(*Cowper*).

devices is bad in itself; every one of them is used with magnificent effect by Milton, but every device is bad when it becomes an habitual trick. The objection to "poetic diction" is not that it is a bad diction, but that it is a *stereotyped* diction. A phraseology which had been very impressive when lit up by the high passion of Milton became very unimpressive, and at length utterly disgusting, when it was habitually used by dozens of dull, unimaginative, and slavish imitators of Milton.

103. The Drama. In the drama of the first half of the eighteenth century there is little that calls for mention here. The immense success of Gay's *Beggars' Opera* (1728) led to dozens of attempts in what may be called the mock-pastoral vein. The comedy of sensibility—we might call it the comedy of tears—was set on foot by Richard STEELE, who, inspired by Collier's attack on the Restoration dramatists,* set out to produce "a comedy that might be no improper entertainment in a Christian commonwealth." In Steele there is a much more decent moral tone than in Congreve, but unfortunately the comic force is much abated; and in Steele's successors there is an intolerable deal of false sentiment and strained pathos. Addison's *Cato* is the most noticeable of the many attempts to naturalise the French style of tragedy—the style, in particular, of Racine. But Addison conveys no idea of the real greatness of his French prototype. *Cato* is a frigid performance, with abundance of fine rhetoric but no action and no passion. Instead of the splendid pageantry of life, we are treated to the spectacle of wordy persons standing up and declaiming philosophy. Many things are said, nothing is done. The play contains a good many lines which have become proverbial, but not a single scene which lives in the memory.

*See Sec. 91.

CHAPTER XVII

THE AUGUSTAN AGE (1700-1745)

(*b*) PROSE

104. Swift. The writer most thoroughly typical and representative of the Augustan period is Pope, and the greatest literary event of the period is the invention, by Steele and Addison, of the periodical essay. But if we ask who, of all the Augustans, was the greatest man, there can be but one reply. In intellectual stature Jonathan SWIFT stands head and shoulders above all his contemporaries. The least important of his writings is stamped with that inexplicable quality which we call genius. Like all great men Swift is a somewhat mysterious figure: we know the story of his life down to minute details, but a credible portrait of him none of his biographers has drawn. Even his intimate friends—such as Pope and Gay and Bolingbroke—seem hardly to have understood him. We think of him always as standing a little apart from the life of his time, in sombre and lonely greatness.

Swift's life—the events of which need not be chronicled here—was one long series of disappointments. His hopes of advancement in the Church were never gratified; the political party with which he had allied himself went down, and he with it; the two women who loved him died, and left him alone. And these blows, falling upon a nature consumed with egotism, distorted his whole view of life. His was not a temper to be softened by adversity: the

older he grew, the more intense and bitter became his contempt for mankind; and at last his rage ate into his very heart and reduced him to a state of semi-imbecility, in which state he died.

Swift was a very voluminous writer; it will suffice to name a few of his more important works. In 1704 appeared the *Tale of a Tub* and the *Battle of the Books.* The former is an allegory dealing with the three principal divisions of the Christian Church—Romanist, Anglican, and Nonconformist. This book was probably responsible for the fact that Swift was not made a bishop; for, without intending to be irreverent or profane, he certainly treated playfully subjects which men of all religions agree to treat reverently. In this early work Swift has already discovered, and learned how to handle, his greatest weapon—irony. The *Battle of the Books* is his contribution to a discussion, then hotly carried on, as to the relative merits of ancient and modern authors; it takes the form of a description, in burlesque Homeric style, of a great battle between the books in the King's library: of all Swift's satires this is the best-tempered.

The period of Swift's political ascendency extended from 1710 till the death of Anne. During that period he was one of the most powerful men in England; his masculine sense, his genius for affairs, enabled him to make literature a political weapon of astonishing effectiveness. The best known of his numerous political tracts is the masterly *Conduct of the Allies*, which was not only a great popular success (the second edition was sold in five hours), but was also more influential in shaping the course of public opinion than any other piece of political writing has ever been, with the possible exception of Burke's pamphlet on the French Revolution. After his party had fallen and he had retired to Ireland, he wrote a long series of

pamphlets on Irish affairs, of which the first and most famous were the "Drapier's Letters," called forth by the episode of "Wood's Halfpence." But those who read Swift's savagely ironical political tracts should, if they would understand his character, read also his *Journal to Stella*, written during his stormiest period, and revealing the exquisite tenderness which lay hidden in his strange nature.

In 1726 appeared the one work of Swift's which is still universally read—*Gulliver's Travels*. It is a masterpiece of wit, of humour, of invention, of narrative art. The distinguishing characteristic of Swift's humour is its imperturbable gravity—the stolid and serious air with which he conducts an argument to a wildly absurd conclusion. Something akin to this is the seriousness with which, in telling a preposterous story, he dwells upon minute details, making us believe, while we read, that he has actually been a witness of all that he narrates. He is one of the most convincing of story-tellers; had such a man as Gulliver really gone through just such adventures, just so, we feel, would he have recounted his experiences. Swift's admirable art in narration, and the novelty of the conception, have made *Gulliver* a favourite book with many who do not grasp the author's satirical intention. Children read it with delight, as they read *The Pilgrim's Progress*, before they are capable of understanding the underlying meaning. *Gulliver* is the most comprehensive satire ever written. Other satirists attack this or that particular man or woman, this or that particular vice or foible: Swift pours his scorn upon human nature as a whole. Gulliver travelling in different countries is simply Swift looking at humanity from different points of view. In Lilliput he sees our contemptible littleness and pettiness; in Brobdingnag he sees the monstrous and loathsome deformities of our nature; in

the land of the Houyhnhnms he compares us with what we call "the brutes," and his conclusion is that of all brutes we are the lowest and most brutal. After reading this horrible satire we are not surprised at the saying of the Archbishop of Dublin, after an interview with Swift: "I have just beheld the most miserable man in the world."

Strength and clearness are the two great virtues of Swift's prose. We have already noted, in his verse, his hatred of ornament, his contempt for rhetorical tricks. It is the same with his prose. His masculine vigour and ease, his sheer naked force, his power of lucid arrangement, combine to make him one of the greatest, if not the very greatest, among the masters of English.

105. Daniel Defoe. Seven years earlier than *Gulliver*, the other prose masterpiece of the period, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, had appeared; and there can be no doubt that in the art of narrative Swift had learned much from Defoe. The latter possesses, pre-eminently among English story-tellers, the power of giving life-likeness to his creations. His minutely circumstantial method of narration may be best studied in *Robinson Crusoe*, but it is also exhibited in all his other stories—picaresque* novels of low life for the most part. There is hardly one of his works—from the *Journal of the Plague Year* to the *Memoirs of a Cavalier*—which has not been mistaken, by a multitude of innocent readers, for genuine history: so convincing is his manner of presenting imaginary events. *Robinson Crusoe* is not only the first but also the greatest example of *realism* in English fiction, if realism means careful elaboration of detail.

It is not, however, the realism of this great book that has given it an enduring fame, but its romance—of which the author was perhaps unconscious—and its gallant

* See note to Sec. 58.

philosophy of life. It is an epic of human endeavour; its pictures of a man's strength and skill and resourcefulness are as inspiring as Swift's pictures are depressing. It is the romance of solitude; it appeals to the romantic imagination as no other work of this prosaic period does. The description of Crusoe's finding of the footprints on the sand rises far above realism; it is romance.

Defoe was the most copious and indefatigable of writers, and did a great deal of more or less capable political work. But nothing that he wrote is now read except his novels; and though some of his minor novels—notably *Captain Singleton*—have been fervently praised by modern critics, none of them will really bear comparison for a moment with the masterpiece which has made his name immortal.

106. The Spectator. Steele and Addison have both been mentioned already, the former as a dramatist, the latter as a dramatist and as a writer of panegyrical verse.* The real fame of both, however, rests on the great work they accomplished in the field of the periodical essay. In 1709 Steele started a newspaper of an entirely novel character, entitled the *Tatler*. Before it had run for many weeks Addison, who was then in Ireland, began to contribute to it, and the two friends between them continued to write the paper till January, 1711, when it abruptly ceased to appear. In March of the same year the first number of the *Spectator* came out; it continued to be published daily till December, 1712. Why it then ceased we do not know; its success had been decisive. We need say nothing of Steele's later ventures in journalism—the *Guardian*, the *Lover*, the *Reader*, and others; nor of Addison's—the *Freeholder*. It is by the two journals which they conducted together that the friends are known to modern readers.

* See Sections 101, 103.

There had been crude forms of journalism in England before this, but they had been for the most part mere "news-letters," giving tidings of what was happening from day to day; or, if they indulged in comment at all, it was political comment, and consisted mainly of attacks on the Government. Addison and Steele did not aim at giving the latest news, nor were they greatly concerned with political questions. Their main business was with the morals and manners of the age: they saw to what depths of licentiousness the anti-Puritan reaction had dragged the nation, and their avowed aim was to recall English society to a higher moral ideal, to set up a standard of taste, and to restore some measure of order and decency to the national life. They are purely didactic* writers. "The general purpose of this paper," said Steele, introducing the *Tatler*, "is to expose the false arts of life, to pull off the disguises of cunning, vanity, and affectation, and to recommend a general simplicity in our dress, our discourse, and our behaviour." "The great and only end of these my speculations," says Addison in the *Spectator*, "is to banish vice and ignorance out of the territories of Great Britain."

They are didactic writers, but their methods are different from those of any previous moralist. They do not thunder against vice: they laugh at it. The *Spectator* addressed an incomparably wider audience than any English writer had hitherto addressed, an audience consisting of women as well as men; it was to women, indeed, that Addison most frequently appealed, and he knew well that women—the women of his time at least—did not take kindly to heavy moralising. His constant aim, therefore, was to present his teaching in an agreeable and entertaining style. He showed his readers that it was possible to be decent without being dull, to be pious

* See note to Sec. 4.

without being a sour ascetic, to be chivalrous without being sentimental, to take an interest in the things of the mind without being pedantic. And he succeeded. It would be an exaggeration to say, with a great French critic,* that Addison "made morality fashionable," but he certainly helped to make vice and folly ridiculous. As a moralist he is not profound—his deepest sayings have, to us at least, a savour of commonplace—but as a moral reformer the work he did is not easily to be over-rated.

Macaulay thought Steele a much inferior writer to Addison; of late years the tendency has been to over-praise Steele at Addison's expense. We certainly find in Steele a natural strain of humour, and of pathos also, for which we look in vain in the work of his friend; but in scholarship, in the ability to depict character, in mastery of the art of prose, and in that weight and dignity which spring from personal character, Addison is decidedly the superior. His prose is marked by elegance and polish, and by something more—a kind of well-bred ease and urbanity, which we find in none of his predecessors. Without the vigour of Dryden, without the tremendous force of Swift, he is familiar yet dignified, colloquial without vulgarity, weighty but never dull or pompous.

107. Philosophy and Theology. By far the profoundest thinker of the period was George BERKELEY, Bishop of Cloyne, whose *Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* was published in 1710. The theory on which his philosophy was based was grossly misunderstood in his own time; it was said, absurdly, that he denied the existence of matter, and that to kick one's foot against a stone was a complete refutation of such nonsense. What Berkeley really did was, not to deny that matter was real, but to inquire into the meaning of

* Taine.

reality. His system, however, cannot be discussed here. He is not widely read, because students of philosophy are few; but no one who does read him can fail to note that he possesses in an eminent degree two virtues rare indeed in philosophic writers—lucidity and charm.

Lucidity without charm marks the style of Joseph BUTLER, Bishop of Bristol, who published a collection of *Sermons* in 1726, and ten years later *The Analogy of Religion.* This latter work is one of our great religious classics, and, as a defence of Christianity on thoroughly "reasonable" grounds, it is especially characteristic of the time which produced it. Though he is not a great literary artist, there is about everything that Butler wrote a manliness and sincerity which command our respect.

108. Summary of the Augustan Age (1700-1745):—

PROSE.	VERSE.
1704. Swift's *Tale of a Tub.*	1704. Addison's *Campaign.*
1709. The *Tatler.*	1709. Pope's *Pastorals.*
1710. Berkeley's *Principles of Human Knowledge.*	1711. ,, *Essay on Criticism.*
1711. The *Spectator.*	1712. ,, *Rape of the Lock.*
1719. Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe.*	1716. Gay's *Trivia.*
1726. Swift's *Gulliver's Travels.*	1726. Thomson's *Winter.*
1736. Butler's *Analogy.*	1728. Pope's *Dunciad* (first version).

DRAMA.

1702. Steele's first comedy.
1713. Addison's *Cato.*
1728. Gay's *Beggars' Opera.*

CHAPTER XVIII

The Middle Georgian Period (1745-1795)

(*a*) PROSE

109. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784). This period is sometimes described as "the age of Johnson," but one may read through Johnson's collected works without discovering any particular reason why a literary epoch should be called by his name. For it must be confessed that this great man produced no great work—nothing, at any rate, of first-rate importance; he did not, like several of his friends—like Goldsmith, for instance, and Burke, and Gibbon, and Boswell—succeed in writing an enduring masterpiece. And yet we somehow feel that these were smaller men than he, and they appear to have felt it themselves. The truth is that Johnson won the almost universal reverence of his contemporaries, and took his place as autocrat of the world of letters, by sheer force of mind and character. It is from his sayings rather than from his writings that we gain some idea of his real genius, of his wit, of his humour, of his burly common-sense, of his manly independence of mind; and, happily for his fame, his sayings have been recorded for us with unexampled fulness by a consummate master of the difficult art of biography, James Boswell, whose *Life of Johnson* is one of the most delightful of English classics.

Johnson's early satires in verse will be spoken of later. Like most men of letters of the period, he tried his hand

at drama; of his blank-verse tragedy, *Irene*, perhaps the less said the better. It may seem strange that popularity should ever have been won by means of a dictionary, but Johnson's famous *Dictionary* (1755), besides being a triumph of unaided scholarship, hit the taste of the time by fixing a rigid standard of "correct" speech. *Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia* (1759), is not, as the name might suggest, a story of African adventure, but an example of a kind of composition once fashionable, the "philosophic tale"; a fable designed to illustrate Johnson's favourite theme, the vanity of human wishes. In various periodicals, such as the *Rambler*, he endeavoured to tread in the steps of Addison and Steele, and though he lacks the sprightliness of his predecessors his essays have much wit, and a commanding good sense, which keep them readable. The last of Johnson's works, the *Lives of the Poets*, is perhaps the most valuable of all. As a critic he is often prejudiced and often perverse; he belittles Milton and Gray, and is enthusiastic over insignificant verse-writers whose very names are forgotten; but of the kinds of poetry and prose with which he is in sympathy he writes admirably, and as a writer of miniature biography he is unsurpassed.

Johnson's earlier prose style is apt to be pompous and pedantic. His marked fondness for the carefully balanced sentence and for long sonorous words of Latin origin, is well known and easily ridiculed. In his own time this style was much admired and closely imitated long after he had himself outgrown it. His later manner, the manner of the *Lives*, is admirably forcible, trenchant and direct. It has the ring of his conversation—terse, vigorous, downright—and at its best it has a sombre majesty which reminds us of the great seventeenth-century masters. If only Johnson had had anything important to say, he would have said it magnificently. As it is, he is a great

figure in literary history, but the time has gone by when he was regarded as a writer of stupendous genius.

110. The Eighteenth-Century Novel. The great event of this period was the perfecting of a new literary form —the modern novel. There had, of course, been novels in English before. The *Arcadia* was a novel, of a sort; so was *Euphues*, and so were the pastorals of Lodge and the "picaresque" tales of Greene and Nash. But none of these had much resemblance to the form of prose fiction which we commonly term the "novel" at the present day, whereas anyone who opens Richardson's *Clarissa* will quickly perceive that here, in all really essential features, is the modern novel.

The rise of this literary species was not an absolutely sudden and inexplicable event. Biographers like Walton, historians like Clarendon, character-writers like Earle, had already shown how to observe and how to describe men and women. The dramatists had shown how dialogue might be made to reveal character. Steele and Addison, with their Sir Roger de Coverley, Will Honeycomb, and the rest, had painted life-like portraits of imaginary individuals, who were also types. Defoe had related imaginary events with a perfectly realistic touch. The new prose was an efficient instrument ready to the hand of the novelist, and, most important of all, the decline of the drama had made room for a new method of painting life. Thus many things conspired to prepare the way for the novel. The suddenness of its advent was, nevertheless, surprising. Rarely can we date a literary event with such precision. We can say, definitely, that in 1740—the date of Richardson's first story—the modern English novel was born.

The eighteenth-century novel is, as we should expect, an unromantic form of literature. The spirit of observation,

of criticism, of analysis, makes itself felt in the novel as in every other kind of writing during this period. The old themes of romance—the knight of supernatural valour, the lady of angelic goodness and beauty—were felt to be outworn and absurd; the novelist turned from the romantic past to the commonplace present. He set himself sedulously to observe and faithfully to depict what he actually saw: his heroes and heroines were the men and women among whom he lived. The novel of this period is thus thoroughly realistic, thoroughly prosaic; it aims at being simply an accurate picture of contemporary life and manners. It is almost always, we must add, didactic in intention. It does not simply paint life for the sake of painting it, but for the sake of instructing and improving the reader. Whether this should be the novelist's aim we need not here inquire: it was certainly the aim of these particular novelists, and we do not understand their work until we realise that it was so.

111. The Two Great Novelists. The father of the modern English novel, Samuel RICHARDSON, wrote his first work, *Pamela*, with this moral end very clearly in view: he hoped the book "might tend to promote the cause of religion and virtue." But in truth the moral atmosphere of Richardson's work is never exhilarating. Virtue is exhibited, not as a noble passion for the right, but as a form of cool and calculating prudence; the lesson conveyed is that goodness pays best—not very lofty teaching. *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753), another very didactic work, was intended to embody its author's ideal of manly excellence: the intolerable priggishness of the hero almost, but not quite, makes the book entertaining. Between these two novels appeared *Clarissa* (1748), Richardson's admitted masterpiece, and one of the very few novels of the world which rise to real tragic grandeur. Even in his

less successful works, however, we may note Richardson's peculiar qualities: the vividness of his situations, the life-likeness of his principal characters, the pitiless precision with which he lays bare the workings of the human heart. He applies his Defoe-like microscopic method not to the description of events, but to the analysis of feelings. For this method he requires an ample canvas; each of his novels is of prodigious length, but the interest, in *Clarissa* at least, is sustained to the close.

Henry FIELDING was an industrious journalist and a prolific playwright, but his work in these directions need not stay us; it is as a novelist that his name is remembered. He became a novelist as it were by accident; disgusted with the vulgar morality of *Pamela*, he set out to write an elaborate parody, but before he had gone very far with it he appears to have become seriously interested in the characters he had created, and the burlesque intention dropped out of sight. The result was *Joseph Andrews* (1742), a novel of a new type—a "comic epic" he himself called it. This was succeeded by *Tom Jones* (1749), and that, again, by *Amelia* (1751). *Jonathan Wild*, a mock-heroic account of the life and death of a highwayman, is a piece of excellent irony, but can hardly be described as a novel.

Tom Jones is undoubtedly Fielding's greatest achievement, and one of the greatest of English novels. Fielding never obtrudes his piety upon us, like Richardson; he says very little about virtue, and he is at times intolerably gross. But of his morality as a whole there can be but one opinion: it is as sound and salutary as Richardson's is mawkish and unwholesome. Fielding is not, like his great rival, a microscopic student of the heart, but his creations live, none the less; and his picture of life has an epic breadth and fulness and variety which no other

novelist has ever surpassed. His work is full of high spirits; he has a great fund of wholesome English humour; and his heart is sound.

112. Minor Novelists. Every one of the novels of Tobias SMOLLETT is picaresque in form—that is to say, the incidents have no connection with each other or with the conclusion, but are simply a string of adventures happening to the same person. In Smollett there is little of Fielding's power of plot-construction. Moreover, his novels suffer from the fact that there is not in them a single character with whom it is possible to feel any active sympathy: the men are mostly brutal ruffians, and the women wooden and uninteresting. But in Smollett we find great variety of incident, great narrative and descriptive power. The battle scene in *Roderick Random* (1748), for instance, once read can never be forgotten. Smollett is an uncompromising realist; he describes what he knows, and is always most successful when he is drawing on his actual experience. His way of depicting a character by a few firm and telling strokes is the very opposite of Richardson's method. Laurence STERNE is one of the most original of humourists. The amount of his production is small; *Tristram Shandy* is his one substantial contribution to literature, the famous *Sentimental Journey* being a mere sketch. Sterne is usually placed among the novelists, yet *Tristram Shandy* is not a novel in any accepted sense, for it has no plot; from beginning to end it is one long string of digressions; it is of all books the most whimsically constructed. Whimsicality, indeed, is of the essence of Sterne's genius. He often sins against taste; he steals, from Burton* and others, without a blush; he is self-conscious and affected; and we cannot acquit him of having made fashionable a false and unreal "sensi-

* See Sec. 60.

bility," as he called it, a quite spurious delicacy of sentiment. But when all deductions are made he remains an original, eccentric, and delightful humourist; and he possesses the true novelist's power of giving life to his creations. Mr. Shandy senior, Uncle Toby, and Corporal Trim are among the most memorable personages of English fiction.

To the later part of this period belong two novels which, though neither of them is now widely read, are of great significance for the student of literary history. Horace WALPOLE'S *Castle of Otranto* (1764) may be held to mark the beginning of the revival of romance in fiction. It is full of supernatural horrors—haunted corridors, clanking chains, portraits that sigh, statues that bleed, and so forth—and so became the ancestor of innumerable wild and blood-curdling tales, romances of mystery and terror, such as those of Mrs. Radcliffe. But by its attempt to re-create the atmosphere of the Middle Ages it undoubtedly prepared the way for the incomparably greater romances of Sir Walter Scott. A very different book is the *Evelina* of Frances BURNEY, the earliest and best of her novels. Miss Burney may be said to have founded the novel of domestic satire—"the romance of the tea-table," as it has been called; and thus she, too, prepared the way for a far greater story-teller—Jane Austen.

113. Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774). Johnson's epitaph on his friend Goldsmith informs us that "he left untouched almost no kind of writing," and adds, quite truly, that "he touched nothing that he did not adorn." He was an essayist, a poet, a dramatist, and a novelist; in order to make money he even became a translator and an historian. Much of his work, indeed, was written simply and solely to make money, and against the grain; but even his hack-work has about it something of his peculiar and indefinable charm. He had the faculty—surely one of the rarest and

most enviable that a writer can possess—of winning his way to the hearts of his readers; there is no other English author, unless it be Charles Lamb, who shows such a power of gaining our personal affection.

Goldsmith's first prose work was an *Inquiry into the State of Polite Learning in Europe*, which we mention only for the sake of quoting from it a sentence which is significant of his aims: "Let us, instead of writing finely, try to write naturally; not hunt after lofty expressions to express mean ideas, nor be for ever gaping when we only mean to deliver a whisper." What he preached, that he also practised—the *naturalness* of his writing is perhaps its greatest merit. His work as a periodical essayist was the best that had been done since Addison. His contributions to *The Bee* and other magazines—and especially the series of delightful letters (supposed to be written by a Chinaman sojourning in London to his friends at home) re-published in 1760 as *The Citizen of the World*—place him with the great English essayists. In ease, vivacity, and delicate grace he is surpassed by none of them.

Goldsmith's greatest achievement, however, is that inimitable prose idyll, *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), which was regarded by himself and his contemporaries as a trifle. It was, indeed, the great German poet, Goethe, who first drew attention to its real greatness. In this story there are, as Goldsmith confessed in his preface, a hundred faults; the flagrant absurdities of the plot have often been pointed out. The plot, however, matters little. The *Vicar* is the first domestic novel in the language; it is the story not of a hero but of a family. Goldsmith paints, with the most genial humour and the most moving tenderness, the quiet daily life of an unsophisticated family in a country village of his own time. Dr. Primrose, the central figure, is one of the great classic creations. Here is "the Christian

character presented in its meekness, its simplicity, its long-suffering, and its cheerfulness"; presented with an apparently artless simplicity of statement which really conceals the utmost subtlety of art.

Goldsmith's prose style is the very opposite of his friend Johnson's, and is the true reflex of his mind, of which the distinguishing trait was a noble simplicity. It is graceful without a trace of insincerity, elegant without pedantry, humorous without buffoonery; a classic style in the best sense of the term. No writer can be more fearlessly recommended as a model to those who are learning to write English.

114. History and Philosophy. The three men who made up what Gibbon called "the triumvirate of British historians" had this in common, that none of them was able to understand or sympathise with enthusiasm of any kind, especially the enthusiasm that springs from religious feeling. This is a grave defect in an historian: if one is to write true history one must not be blind to any side of human nature. Of the three, William ROBERTSON was probably the most popular in his own time, and is certainly the most neglected to-day. His *History of the Reign of Charles V.* (1769), the most valuable of his works, shows him to have been a man of untiring industry and of great sagacity; but he lacked the modern historian's idea of the need for wide research and the duty of laborious accuracy; and he is wanting in the graces of style which might have attracted us in spite of these defects. David HUME, whose *History of England* was completed in 1761, suffers from the same defects as Robertson, with greater literary power; he writes in a clear, simple, easy, and unaffected manner which makes his narrative pleasant reading, however untrustworthy it may be as to the facts. But by far the greatest member of the triumvirate—one of the very

greatest, indeed, of all historians—was Edward GIBBON (1737-1794). The work of his life, the work to which he devoted all the powers of his mind, was the *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* The story of the composition of this great work may be read in his delightful *Autobiography.* His one serious defect has already been noted: he was unable to sympathise with *emotion* of any kind. Gibbon, unlike Hume and Robertson, is still treated with profound respect by historians, and is still studied by everyone who wishes to understand the history of the period about which he wrote. For fulness of research and for accuracy of statement he is unrivalled. The keynote of his style is an elaborate and stately magnificence. The pomp and splendour of his sentences is, no doubt, apt to grow wearisome, but it is impossible not to be impressed by the majesty of his manner, even though it is never that highest kind of majesty which comes of perfect simplicity.

In philosophy the greatest name of the period is that of David HUME, whose *Treatise of Human Nature*, though it was almost unnoticed when it appeared in 1739, has deeply influenced the course of European thought. Whatever may be said of Hume as an historian, it is universally acknowledged that as a thinker he ranks with the greatest masters; but with his philosophic doctrines we have no concern. Political Economy, as a science, may be said to have been founded during this period; and here again Hume, with his *Political Discourses*, must be considered a pioneer. But Adam SMITH, whose *Wealth of Nations* appeared in 1776, will always be thought of as the real founder of the science; and such is the perfect clearness of his style that his book is still one of the most easily read of all treatises on the subject: his doctrines we must pass over in silence. Nor in a short summary like this can we attempt to do justice to the great work done by Edmund

BURKE (1730-1797), who has been described, with justice, as "our wisest political thinker." Of all the writers named in this chapter, Burke alone rises clear above the limitations of his time; he is a logical thinker, but he sympathises with feelings which have nothing to do with logic—for example, with the noble passion for liberty. He understands that human nature is intricate, and not to be explained in terms of clear reasoning. And though he never loses his hold on actuality, though he hates "metaphysical abstractions"—airy theories that will not stand the test of practice—yet his constant endeavour is to get at true and sound principles. These qualities combine to make his pamphlets and printed speeches a storehouse of admirable political wisdom; and his manner, with its sustained dignity and its occasional bursts of matchless eloquence, is scarcely less excellent than his matter.

CHAPTER XIX

The Middle Georgian Period (1745-1795)

(*b*) POETRY AND DRAMA

115. The School of Pope. During the latter half of the eighteenth century, and indeed well on into the nineteenth, innumerable writers appear to have thought that Pope had brought the art of versification to perfection, and that, since they could not improve on him, it was their duty to imitate him. A very fair imitation of Pope's manner can be turned out by a person who does not possess a spark of Pope's wit: it is possible to produce a very dull and tedious composition in which the heroic couplet is managed "correctly" and the diction is "poetic" throughout. This may stand as a rough description of the work of many verse-writers of the period, who need not be mentioned by name.

But of those who accepted the tradition handed down by Pope, there are two who deserve separate mention: both have been mentioned already in connection with their prose work—Johnson and Goldsmith. It was as a verse-writer that Johnson first won distinction; his *London* (1738) was praised by Pope himself. *The Vanity of Human Wishes* followed in 1749. So far as their subject-matter is concerned both of these poems are imitations of satires by the Roman poet Juvenal. But neither of them is a satire in our usual sense, for they do not attack individuals; there is in them nothing of Dryden's splendid scorn or Pope's

polite malignity. Johnson mentions names only in order to illustrate his philosophic themes: his poetry is therefore didactic rather than satirical. Among didactic compositions also we must number Goldsmith's two principal poems, *The Traveller* (1764) and the better-known *Deserted Village* (1770). These two men, even if they had written nothing but these poems, would still be remembered—Johnson for his lofty moral note, Goldsmith for his grace and tender feeling; Johnson for his force, Goldsmith for his charm. But so far as the art of verse-writing is concerned, they both trod, and were content to tread, in the footsteps of Pope.

116. Heralds of Revolt. All through the second half of the eighteenth century it became increasingly evident that men were growing weary of the stereotyped conventions of the "classical" school. Even before the middle of the century, Thomson, Young, and others had succeeded, as we have seen, in freeing themselves from the tyranny of the heroic couplet; and Thomson, at least, had shown a genuine love of nature. But the first really significant hints of the coming change were given by two poets who have so many points in common that they are constantly bracketed together by modern critics—William COLLINS (1721-1759) and Thomas GRAY (1716-1771). The published poetry of Collins is small in amount; the best of it is contained in the slim volume of *Odes* which appeared in 1747. Gray's poetical output is little greater in quantity. His *Ode on Eton College* was published in 1747; in 1751 appeared *An Elegy wrote in a Country Church-Yard*; in 1757 *The Bard* and *The Progress of Poesy* were printed in one small volume. Each of his principal poems was written years before it was published; it was characteristic of him that he polished and re-polished his work with the most sedulous care.

Collins was an ardent lover of the Greek tragic poets, and he strove to give to his own work a Greek simplicity and purity of style. It was not in him to restore the frank simplicity of the Elizabethans; when Gray and Collins are simple, it is the result of deliberate art. The beauty of their most beautiful work is of a cold and austere type; they express feeling, but feeling severely controlled and restrained by reason. The briefest of the odes of Collins, *How sleep the brave who sink to rest*, is the most perfect example of his delicate art. As for Gray, his *Elegy* is perhaps the most popular poem in the language, and certainly the best of its author's works. It expresses universal human feelings about life and death in simple and dignified form, and the extraordinary felicity of many of the lines has given them the currency of proverbs. The two "Pindaric odes"—*The Bard* and *The Progress of Poesy*—are full of pomp and magnificence; but they are so elaborately artificial in structure, and so ornate and rhetorical in diction, that neither of them is fit to be compared with that sincere and simple record of sincere and simple feeling, the immortal *Elegy*.

Gray and Collins were men of genius, but they were children of the time, and could not free themselves from the conventions of the time. Neither of them quite succeeded in getting rid of the trammels of "poetic diction." Both are fond of personifying abstractions. Thus, Gray speaks of "grinning Infamy" and "Shame that skulks behind"; Collins of "brown Exercise," "dejected Pity," and so on. We can hardly find a better example of the common trick of periphrasis * than in Gray's account of the schoolboys who "chase the rolling circle's speed," *i.e.*, drive hoops. But both of them strove to restore feeling and imagination to their rightful place in poetry; both

* See Sec. 102.

abandoned the heroic couplet and introduced great metrical variety into their work; both sought *beauty* of form rather than mere *correctness*; and in the work of both, and especially of Collins, we note a lyrical power, a genuine singing quality, which is almost, if not wholly, absent from the work of their immediate predecessors.

117. Watchwords of Revolt. Weariness of the accepted and conventional forms of poetry showed itself at first mainly by the tendency to *return to the past*, by a new interest in the life, and appreciation of the literature, of bygone times.

Men began to study diligently the writings of Milton, of Spenser, and of Shakespeare; and the better minds began to perceive that in the work of these "rude" and "barbarous" writers there was a greatness which was entirely wanting in the polished and artificial work of their successors. Attention was given to still older writers than these — to such men as Chaucer and Lydgate. Thomas Warton's *History of English Poetry*, of which the first volume appeared in 1774, is significant of this new interest, to which it gave impetus by exhibiting the beauties of many a forgotten poet. The imitations of fifteenth-century verse by Thomas CHATTERTON, a poet of great original powers, who died, in 1770 at the age of eighteen, are also memorable. Chatterton pretended that his poems were copied from old manuscripts which he had discovered in a church at Bristol. The discussion aroused by these forgeries showed conclusively that the study of old English books was becoming widespread. Another notable event was the publication, in 1765, of Bishop Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, a collection of the old popular ballads, which had hitherto been neglected as beneath the notice of educated men. This book gave great encouragement to the growing taste for

simple narrative verse and for simple metrical forms. The immediate result was that imitation ballads became fashionable; and though these were often deplorably bad, still the study of the old ballad-writers, with their directness, their freshness, their flashes of genuine poetry, exerted a salutary influence on popular taste.

But the return to the past was not merely a return to the Middle Ages. Tired of cities and of civilisation, poets began to turn to the legends of primitive peoples. Gray, in such fragments as the *Descent of Odin*, pointed to Scandinavian mythology as a new source of poetic inspiration, and his lead was eagerly followed by many minor verse-writers. His *Bard*, again, is significant of a new interest in Celtic tradition. Macpherson's prose renderings of Gaelic folk-song, which he pretended were translations from the manuscripts of an ancient bard, Ossian, were received with great applause, though Johnson at once denounced them as a fraud.

But weariness of the civilised life of cities means not only a return to the past, it implies also a *return to nature*. The fidelity of observation displayed in the descriptive parts of Thomson's *Seasons* has already been noted. Gray in some of his poems—and far more distinctly in his letters to his friends—shows that he keenly appreciated the beauties of natural scenery. Collins in his *Ode to Evening* reveals a surprising power of seizing and putting into words, by a few touches, the prevailing tone of a landscape. Even Goldsmith, at least in his *Deserted Village*, showed that in spite of himself he was affected by the new influences at work around him. As the century advanced, pastoral and descriptive poems became very common; and though these revealed no great poetic power, they showed unmistakably which way the wind was blowing.

118. Poets of the Transition. William COWPER stands as it were between two worlds of poetry. The didactic and satirical poems of his first important volume, *Table-Talk* (1782), are written in the orthodox rhymed couplet, and both his choice of subjects and his smooth conventional manner of handling them proclaim him a follower of Pope, though his satires show hardly a trace of Pope's satiric gift. But in 1785 the appearance of *The Task*—a curious medley of personal observations, opinions, and feelings—announced a new and original poet. It is true that Cowper never quite frees himself from conventional tricks: his woodman, instead of simply smoking a pipe,

> "Adjusts the fragrant charge of a short tube
> That fumes beneath his nose."

Yet, instead of employing vague generalities about nature, as so many of his predecessors had done, he describes minutely and accurately what he has actually seen. His feeling for nature, and the plain directness of his expression of that feeling, make him a real precursor of Wordsworth. Cowper, however, lives chiefly by reason of his shorter lyrics, of which the keynote is unadorned simplicity. The noble plainness of the *Loss of the Royal George*, the tender feeling of the *Lines on Receipt of his Mother's Picture*, the piercing pathos of the verses *To Mary Unwin* and of his last poem, *The Castaway*, place these poems among the few lyrical masterpieces of the eighteenth century.

George CRABBE, whose most important poem, *The Village*, appeared in 1783, is also notable for the fidelity of his observation and the minuteness of his descriptions. He is to-day almost universally neglected, and it seems improbable that he will ever again be widely read. He is a wonderfully accurate observer of common things, but he lacks the power of making us feel the *poetry* of common

things. Nevertheless his work, with its directness and homeliness, its entire freedom from affectation or pretentiousness, exerted a wholesome influence on some of his successors. William BLAKE, in whose writings there is much that is obscure and even unintelligible, and much that is uncouth and shapeless, is, nevertheless, the author of some of the most exquisite lyrics in the language. His *Songs of Innocence* (1789) attracted no attention whatever in his own time, they ran so directly counter to the prevailing taste; but later generations have seen in these little masterpieces of verbal music a lyrical genius closely akin to that of the best Elizabethan song-writers.

119. Burns. Scotland's contributions to literature may seem to have been unduly neglected in the preceding pages; but the reader is not to suppose that this is due to an oversight, or that there was a Scottish literature, of equal importance with English, growing up side by side with the latter during the periods we have been surveying. The fact is that from the time of Dunbar * to the time of Burns, Scotland produced no literary work of importance. We refer, of course, to works written in the Scottish dialect,† not simply to works written by Scotchmen. Hume was a Scotchman; so were Smollett, Adam Smith, Thomson, and several others whose work we have dealt with: but all these wrote in English. In the Scottish dialect there had been, indeed, a continuous stream of poetry, especially ballad-poetry; but this is important for us mainly as it influenced Burns and Scott.

Robert BURNS (1759-1796) is sometimes spoken of almost as if he had invented Lowland Scots, or at least as if he had been the first to adapt it to poetic uses. In

* See Sec. 40.

† By the Scottish dialect is meant *Lowland Scots* (or *Lallan*), which is not to be confused with the *Gaelic* spoken in the Highlands of Scotland.

reality it had been used in poetry for centuries before he wrote; and with the work of his predecessors he was thoroughly acquainted. To these predecessors, and especially to Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson, his indebtedness was immense. Like Chaucer and Shakespeare, he was a great borrower; like them, too, he showed his original genius by the use he made of his borrowings.

Burns was also steeped in the English verse of his own century; and when he wrote in English he could write as tamely, as conventionally, as insincerely, as any of the degenerate followers of Pope. This portion of his work is, happily, not very great in quantity; in quality it is of little importance. It is on the poems written in the speech of his own country-side that the enduring fame of Burns must rest.

It is impossible here to give a full account of these widely varied poems. Perhaps the best of them are those brief and beautiful songs in which the passion of love finds a full, clear utterance, such as it finds only in the work of the greatest of the world's poets. In the love-lyrics of Burns we have none of the frigid insincere compliments of the eighteenth-century English lyrists, none of the fantastic and wire-drawn similitudes of the school of Donne: * here we have lyrical poetry at its best,—words set on fire by passion. Only less good are the drinking songs, in which the reckless convivial mood is expressed with a freedom and fire, a vigour and swing, for which one must go back nearly two centuries to find a parallel. Then there are the satires, in which the poet's manly hatred of cant and hypocrisy finds a richly humorous expression; the extraordinarily vivid descriptions of the life lived by those around him; the nature-poems, full of tender sympathy for the lower animals; and the patriotic lyrics, such as the

* See Sec. 79.

famous *Scots wha hae.* In all these departments Burns did memorable and enduring work; and his best work in each class gives us that sense of effortless ease and mastery which is the clearest sign of supreme genius.

120. The Drama. In the dramatic work of this period there is little that calls for mention. Of tragedy there is none—or none of the slightest importance. Of the writers of comedy only two need be noticed; these two, however, take very high rank. Goldsmith's two plays, *The Good-Natured Man* (1768) and *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), may be said to have brought back honest laughter to the theatre, over which the "sentimental comedy"* had tyrannised too long. Goldsmith's dramatic methods were adopted, to a great extent, by Richard Brinsley SHERIDAN, whose best comedies were all produced between 1775 and 1780. Of these *The School for Scandal* is the most popular, and contains the best of Sheridan's character sketches, in Charles and Joseph Surface, and Sir Peter and Lady Teazle. After Sheridan came a period of barrenness in this department of literature. Whether that period has yet come to an end is a question which we shall not here discuss.

* See Sec. 103.

121. Summary of the Middle Georgian Period (1745-1795):—

PROSE.

1748. Richardson's *Clarissa.*
1749. Fielding's *Tom Jones.*
1754. Hume's *History* (vol. I.).
1759. Johnson's *Rasselas.*
1759. Sterne's *Tristram Shandy.*
1766. Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield.*
1773. Burke's *Thoughts on Present Discontents.*
1773. Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer.*
1776. Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* (vol. I.).
1776. Smith's *Wealth of Nations.*
1777. Sheridan's *School for Scandal.*
1778. Johnson's *Lives of the Poets.*
1791. Boswell's *Life of Johnson.*

VERSE.

1747. Collins' *Odes.*
1749. Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes.*
1751. Gray's *Elegy.*
1764. Goldsmith's *Traveller.*
1765. Percy's *Reliques of English Poetry.*
1770. Goldsmith's *Deserted Village.*
1783. Crabbe's *Village.*
1785. Cowper's *Task.*
1786. Burns' *Poems.*
1789. Blake's *Songs of Innocence.*

CHAPTER XX

LATER GEORGIAN PERIOD (1795-1832)

(*a*) POETRY

122. The Romantic Movement. The great literary revolution of which we are now to speak is sometimes called *the romantic revolt*, and sometimes *the romantic revival*; and both names are appropriate.

It was a revolt—a revolt against the arbitrary rules and conventions of the "classical" school. In poetry, for instance, the heroic couplet, which had gone so long unchallenged, was hurled from its place of honour; and the tyranny of "poetic diction"* was scornfully set aside. These are questions of *form*; we may say, more broadly, that the movement was a revolt against the exclusive worship of form in general. But it went deeper than this: it was a revolt against the whole eighteenth-century view of life—the purely logical and unimaginative way of looking at things.

It is well, however, to think of the movement as a revival rather than a revolt. The Age of Reason was at an end; through the minds and hearts of men coursed a new and fiery life, and the old and shrunken body of literature felt the quickening impulse and renewed its youth. Passion and imagination found full and free expression once again, as in the great Elizabethan days. It is not possible to summarise briefly the causes of this

*See Sec. 88.

renascence; but we ought to note the great influence which *German literature* now for the first time exerted on the literature of England. The French Revolution may be described as the political effect of causes whereof the romantic revival was the literary effect.

So far as poetry is concerned, we may distinguish two stages of the movement. Between 1795 and 1810 the chief poetic work of those whom we may call the elder romantics—Scott, Wordsworth, and Coleridge—was done. After 1810, Shelley, Byron, and Keats—the younger romantics—began to write.

123. Scott. The career, as a poet, of Sir Walter SCOTT may be very briefly chronicled. His first literary efforts consisted of translations of German ballads and of a German drama; but these are of little value or interest. He found his true path when he turned for inspiration to the legends and the ballads of his own country-side, the Scottish Border. In the lore of this little corner of the world his mind had been steeped from earliest childhood, and his memory was extraordinarily retentive. The notes to his *Border Minstrelsy* (1802) showed a depth of sympathy, as well as a fulness of knowledge, hitherto displayed by no one who had dealt with the old ballads; and the original compositions which he inserted in the collection proved that he had caught the very spirit of the balladists. *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* was at first meant to take its place among other ballads in a later volume of the same collection; but he soon discovered that the story was too long for the purpose, and it was published as a separate poem in 1805. It was a triumphant popular success, and was followed in quick succession by other tales in verse, of which the best are *Marmion* and *The Lady of the Lake*, each more successful than its predecessor. But this sudden blaze of popularity was too bright to last; the public

turned from Scott to Moore and Byron, and *The Lord of the Isles* (1815) was a comparative failure. With unexampled ease Scott thereupon abandoned poetry and took up another kind of work—prose fiction—in which he was to win an even wider fame. Except for occasional lyrics, no verse of importance came from his pen after 1810—for *The Lord of the Isles*, though it contains striking passages, falls as a whole far below the level of his best.

Scott's verse, overpraised when it first appeared, has since been unjustly dismissed as mere fluent jingle. True, he is not one of the exquisite artists in words; we need not look in his work for magical felicities of diction, for subtle effects of verbal music; his place is not with Milton nor with Keats. But his lines have a gallant ringing music of their own: we seem to hear, as we read, the beating of drums, the clatter of armour, the tramping of men. In Scott's verse, as in his prose, there is a brave zest for life and movement and adventure; he is the poet of action. As a narrative artist, as a teller of tales in verse, he will bear comparison with the very greatest; no competent reader can fail to admire the swiftness, the vividness, the vigour of his manner. In the oft-quoted description of the duel between Fitz-James and Roderick Dhu his splendid power reaches perhaps its highest point: his signal merits as a poet may be studied in that passage.

We have already noted, in Gray and his successors, the first faint notes of a deeper feeling for nature and of a deeper feeling for the past. Both notes are very clearly sounded in the poetry of Scott—the second, perhaps, more clearly than the first, but both are there. If he taught men to appreciate the romantic beauty of Scottish legend, he taught them also to appreciate the romantic beauty of Scottish scenery. His power of vivid description was displayed in his accounts of mountain tarn and wooded glen

as well as in his accounts of border-forays and knightly adventures, of Flodden and of Bannockburn.

124. Wordsworth. Scott was the first of the new poets to win the public ear; several years before his earliest publication, a far greater poet had spoken, but at first his words had gone almost unheeded. Many years were to pass before William WORDSWORTH (1770-1850) could achieve anything like popularity. A real epoch in the history of English poetry is marked by the publication (in 1798) of the *Lyrical Ballads* of Wordsworth and his friend Coleridge (whose work will be spoken of in the next section). Two years later appeared a greatly enlarged edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, with a long preface explaining and defending Wordsworth's view of the nature of poetry. This book and the two volumes of *Poems* published in 1807 contain, it is generally agreed, the best of Wordsworth's lyrical work. An interesting and beautiful autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*, though not published till after his death, belongs also to this early period. Of his later publications it must suffice to mention two. He planned a huge philosophic poem in three parts, to be called *The Recluse*; but he finished only the second part, published in 1814 as *The Excursion.* (A fragment of the first part was printed nearly forty years after his death.) *The White Doe of Rylstone*, a metrical tale which the public thoughtlessly dismissed as a poor imitation of Scott, appeared in 1815. From that date till his death in 1850 he wrote much verse, but almost nothing of first-rate excellence. His early work, however, which had been greeted with indifference or even violent scorn by the leading critics of the hour, was all the while steadily winning its way; and he lived long enough to find himself regarded by the public with sympathy and reverence. In 1843 he was made poet-laureate—one sign, among many,

of the changed attitude towards him on the part of the world of readers.

Wordsworth probably regarded *The Excursion* as by far the most important of his works; but even fervent admirers of that poem are generally ready to admit that it is as a lyrical rather than as a didactic or philosophic poet that he takes his high place among the master-spirits.

Wordsworth's belief, as set forth in *The Preface* already mentioned, was that "there neither is nor can be any essential difference between the language of Prose and Verse." The poet ought to use "a selection of the language really used by men," and especially of the language used "in humble and rustic life"; the peasants are people who "hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived." Wordsworth's hatred of the false and showy diction, which he found everywhere accepted as the one language fit for the purposes of poetry, no doubt led him too far in the opposite direction. He never actually put into practice his theory concerning rustic speech; but his theory that the language of prose was the proper language of poetry also he did put into practice, and the result was, often enough, verse ludicrously prosaic. Nevertheless, the central idea of *The Preface*—that great poetry could be written about the simplest subjects, and in the simplest manner—was thoroughly sound, and Wordsworth is at his greatest when he clings most closely to this idea. To show the world the poetic aspect of common things and humble lives, and to express that aspect in language of unadorned and noble simplicity: that was the aim with which Wordsworth set out.

He began as a narrative poet, and the stories he told were so simple that some of the critics of his own time dismissed them as merely trivial and childish; they were

unable to appreciate the depth of feeling in such a poem, for instance, as *Lucy Gray*, a masterpiece in Wordsworth's earlier manner. As he grew older he turned more and more from narrative poetry to the poetry of meditation and description; and his manner became more elaborate. There is a vast difference between the extreme simplicity of *We are Seven* and the lofty austerity and stateliness of *Laodamia*; the difference of style is as marked as the difference of subject. His study of older writers, and especially of Milton, had an influence upon his choice of words, and he came to perceive that the speech of every-day life is not the sole speech possible to the true poet. The sonnet, which is by no means one of the simplest forms of verse, became a favourite instrument of expression with him; and his best sonnets are among the most beautiful in any language. There is little to remind us of his early theories in such lines as these:

> "Huge trunks!—and each particular trunk a growth
> Of intertwisted fibres serpentine
> Up-coiling, and inveterately convolved."

Yet, in all the best of Wordsworth's poetry, no matter at what period of his life it was produced, we recognise, as a distinguishing mark, the same "noble plainness," the same absence of glittering ornament, the same simplicity, sincerity, and directness.

The purpose of Wordsworth's poetry was, in his own words, "to console the afflicted; to add sunshine to day-light, by making the happy happier; to teach the young, and the gracious of every age, to see, to think and feel, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous." And he sought to make men happier by directing their attention to a neglected source of happiness, communication with external nature. It is as high-priest

of Nature that Wordsworth makes his chief appeal to us. His attitude to Nature is quite different from that of Scott. Scott might admire a grand and rugged scene, and employ it as a picturesque setting for a romantic tale; Wordsworth did not need to go in search of rugged or picturesque scenery, because he worshipped Nature as a whole, feeling in her the presence of something divine. He did not pride himself on being a close observer of Nature's ways; what he sought rather was to keep his mind in a state of "wise passiveness," to allow Nature to act upon it, and to reproduce in his verse something of the deep joy which came to him from such communication with the outer world. Nature seemed to him the best teacher of men, and to bring men to the feet of this teacher was the purpose of his poetry.

125. Coleridge. The *Lyrical Ballads*, as we saw, were the joint production of Wordsworth and his friend Samuel Taylor COLERIDGE, who contributed to the little volume the most famous of all his poems, *The Ancient Mariner*. Coleridge himself has told us how the friends conceived the idea of writing this book together, and making it exemplify two distinct kinds of poetry. Wordsworth was to "give the charm of novelty to things of everyday," to direct attention to the wonder and beauty of a world, familiarity with which had made men blind to its real loveliness; while Coleridge was to take supernatural events and characters, and give "a human interest and a semblance of truth" to such "shadows of imagination." *The Ancient Mariner* perfectly illustrates this strange power of giving the appearance of reality to a magical world.

The best of Coleridge's poetry was produced during the year in which he enjoyed almost daily intercourse with Wordsworth, and there can be little doubt that each of these great men exerted a profound influence on the other.

Coleridge's genius, indeed, was more clearly revealed by his conversation than by his writings; "the most wonderful man I have ever known," is the verdict of Wordsworth, and it is echoed by Lamb, by Hazlitt, and by many others of the ablest men of the time. The story of his life is a story of broken purposes and baffled endeavours, of high aims and poor results; he revolved vast schemes in poetry, politics, philosophy, theology, and criticism, and he did little that can be called first-rate in any of these departments. The long tragedy of his life began on the day when, to dull the torments of neuralgia, he took his first dose of opium; the drug quickly became his master, and the result was a general weakening of his character. Thenceforth no great work, no work requiring long-sustained effort, was possible to him. But fragmentary as his work is, the best of the fragments are of a kind to show us, without the testimony of his friends, that Coleridge was a genius of the first order.

Of his critical writings we shall speak in the next chapter. Of his poems, the best are *The Ancient Mariner*, *Christabel*, and *Kubla Khan*; when we have read these, and perhaps half-a-dozen others which are only less good, we can afford to neglect the remainder of his verse. In each of the three poems named the scene is laid in a fantastic dream-world, which the poet's imagination clothes with colour and music. In pure musical quality, in mastery of rhythm and magic of phrase, Coleridge is unequalled; and his influence left its mark on the work of almost all his successors.

126. Byron. George Gordon Noel BYRON, known from his peerage as Lord Byron, was the first of the later generation of romantic poets to win the public ear. The success of *Childe Harold*, of which the first two cantos were published in 1812, was even more dazzling than the

success of Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel*; the young poet, in his own words, "awoke one morning to find himself famous." For some years his popularity in England was great; greater, probably, than any other English poet has ever won during his own lifetime. But after his death his fame declined almost as rapidly as it had arisen; and even to-day, although his real greatness is far better appreciated than it was fifty years ago, we find some difficulty in understanding the enthusiasm aroused by his work on its first appearance. On the continent his reputation has never waned at all; outside the British Isles there is no country in Europe where Byron is not very generally regarded as the greatest of English poets.

The early cantos of *Childe Harold* were followed in quick succession—for, like Scott, Byron was an extremely rapid writer—by the *Giaour*, the *Bride of Abydos*, the *Corsair*, *Lara*, and other tales in verse. The great popularity of these was due in part to the unfamiliar scenery, that of the Eastern Mediterranean, to which they introduced their readers; and in part to the fascination of the central figure, the typical "Byronic" hero, who appears with small variation in each: a pale and melancholy being, of vast strength and courage, with a mysterious smile, a stormily passionate nature, and slight regard for the moral law. This theatrical and unreal creation was felt to be a portrait of Byron himself, and was found strongly attractive by the young people of the day.

In 1816 occurred the great crisis of Byron's life. For reasons still unknown, his wife left him, and the public, quite irrationally, assumed that he was to blame; there was a great outcry against him, and he, in a fury of indignation, left England, never to return. For the eight years which remained to him of life he dwelt chiefly in Italy, whence he sent poem after poem to his publisher in

London. These poems, in spite of the furious hostility he had incurred, were received with undiminished enthusiasm by the general public.

To this later period belongs the best and most enduring part of his work. We need name only the third and fourth cantos of *Childe Harold*; the long series of dramas which includes *Cain* and *Marino Faliero*; and, above all, the three poems in which his comic genius at last finds full expression, *Beppo*, the *Vision of Judgment*, and *Don Juan*. In 1823, turning from literature to action, he set sail for Greece, with the purpose of rendering personal aid to the Greeks in their struggle with Turkey—an enterprise not unworthy of a poet who had written so much fervid verse in praise of Liberty. At Missolonghi, early in the next year, he died of rheumatic fever.

The defects of Byron's verse are generally admitted. He was, as we have said, a rapid writer; and for those beauties which spring from patient thought and careful workmanship we look in vain in his writings. The deep meditative passion of Wordsworth, the fine moral fervour of Shelley, the subtle and exquisite music of Coleridge, are wholly absent from his work. Even as a teller of tales he will not bear comparison with Scott; despite some vivid passages, such as the account of Waterloo in *Childe Harold*, his narratives are ill-constructed and tedious. His melody, when he is melodious, is of rather a tawdry and commonplace kind. He has been praised for his "sincerity and strength" by two eminent critics; but this praise is hardly applicable to his earlier work, in which the tone of world-weariness and misanthropy is an evident affectation. It does apply, however, to most of the verse he wrote after his quarrel with English society; the smarting of his powerful spirit under a sense of cruel injustice inspired him with a strong and bitter eloquence which he had not

before possessed. He had but one theme—himself; he could describe natural scenery only when it reflected his own moods; and when he denounced the conventions of civilisation he was denouncing something with which he himself had come into collision. But within this narrow range of feeling he could express himself with unrivalled vigour. The style of *Don Juan* is a style of admirable flexibility and strength; by means of it he is able to pass, apparently without effort, from grave to gay, from bitter invective to easy banter, from cynical mockery to passionate lament. Byron was in no sense a great teacher, but he was a great force; and his genuine hatred of cant, of shams and hypocrisies of all sorts, makes him on the whole a force for good. His genius turned his personal sufferings into a spectacle which still moves men's hearts.

127. Shelley. Like his friend Byron, Percy Bysshe SHELLEY spent the most fruitful years of his life in Italy. Like Byron, too, he was a revolutionary and a rebel; from his earliest youth he was in conflict with accepted opinions and accepted rules of conduct. But in the essentials of character no two men could be more unlike, and the difference is reflected in their verse. Byron was before all things a man of the world: few men have been less worldly than Shelley. Byron, as a man, had some admirable traits, but he certainly exhibited nothing of Shelley's almost unearthly purity and beauty of character; Shelley did and said many fantastic and foolish things, especially in his youth, but he was always actuated by a fiery desire to do right. In Shelley's work, again, one feels the inspiration of a passionate hope for the future of humanity, which contrasts strikingly with Byron's cynical pessimism. In short, Byron was a rebel; Shelley was not only a rebel but also a reformer. The "passion for reforming the world" animates his poetry from beginning to end.

This reforming zeal is evident even in the first of his long poems, *Queen Mab*; written while he was a mere boy, it is of no great value. *Alastor*, a piece of blank verse, evidently written under the influence of Wordsworth, is interesting as an effort at self-portraiture, but somewhat vague and incoherent; the same may be said of the *Revolt of Islam*, a long narrative poem in the Spenserian stanza.* *Julian and Maddalo*, written in a more familiar style than Shelley usually employed, was the fruit of a visit to Byron, and gives us an interesting picture of that poet as Shelley saw him. This was followed by what is perhaps the greatest of Shelley's longer productions, the splendid *Prometheus Unbound* (1819). No poet since Milton had been so deeply influenced by the great literature of ancient Greece as Shelley was. In this poem he took the Greek myth of Prometheus, and shaped it into a symbol of heroic endurance and heroic effort for the welfare of mankind.

The *Prometheus* is dramatic in form, but in reality it is rather lyric than drama; a sustained outburst of song rather than a picture of action and passion. Shelley tried his hand at true drama in *The Cenci*, a tragedy founded on an old Italian story. Of his longer poems the only other which need be mentioned is the *Adonais*, a beautiful elegy on the death of Keats, in which the poet has enshrined his highest thoughts about life and death and immortality.

It may be doubted, however, whether Shelley is at his greatest in any of these poems. He lives rather by his brief lyrics. Some of these, such as the *Cloud*, the *Skylark*, the *Ode to the West Wind*, are known and loved by every lover of poetry; there are many others which, if less popular, come perhaps still closer to perfection. For a

* See Sec. 53.

certain ethereal grace and delicacy of music Shelley has no rival among the world's masters of song.

128. Keats. Byron died at the age of thirty-six, Shelley at the age of thirty. John KEATS, the youngest of the three, had the shortest career of all; he was but twenty-five when he died of consumption, at Rome, in 1821. His first volume of *Poems* (1817) contained little of enduring value, the best thing in it being the famous sonnet *On first looking into Chapman's Homer*,* though the lines entitled *Sleep and Poetry* are very interesting as giving us the poet's views on the nature of poetry, as Wordsworth gave his in the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. *Endymion*, published in the following year, Keats himself, with characteristic modesty, described "as a feverish attempt rather than a deed accomplished." It tells at great length the old Greek story of the love of the moon-goddess for a mortal youth; though it contains fine passages, on the whole it gives little idea of Keats' real powers. His third volume, which appeared in 1820, contains almost all of the verse by which Keats lives, and it is astonishing to reflect that this wonderful volume was the fruit of little more than a year's labour. During the last year of his life he was too ill to write; his beautiful "last sonnet" is almost the only piece of verse produced after the publication of the third volume.

In the longest poem in the book, the fragment of *Hyperion*, he returns to Greek myth, and handles it in blank verse of which the severity and dignity remind us of Milton. This is a magnificent poem, but it is not so characteristic of Keats as the poems, in rhyme, which deal with mediæval subjects, such as *Isabella* and the *Eve of St. Agnes*. The first is a re-handling of one of the stories of Boccaccio, the great Italian writer from whom Chaucer

* See p. 71.

borrowed the plot of his *Troilus and Cressida*.* The second, written in the Spenserian stanza, is a simple love story founded on an old tradition; it contains a succession of vivid and richly-coloured pictures. *Lamia* is a tale of enchantment, told without any of the shadowy suggestions, the hints of supernatural horror, with which Coleridge would have treated it, and which Keats himself employs in the wonderful ballad of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*.† Finally, the volume contained several *Odes*, of which the best known are those *To a Nightingale*, *To Autumn*, and *On a Grecian Urn*. The beauty of these imperishable lyrics must be felt; it cannot be described, much less can it be analysed. No other poems possess so much of what can only be called the magic of poetry.

129. Minor Poets. Of those whom we now-a-days consider the minor poets of the period, some were by no means looked upon as minor poets in their own day. Robert SOUTHEY, for instance—Coleridge's brother-in-law and Wordsworth's predecessor in the office of poet-laureate—not only fervidly believed in himself, but was regarded as a great poet by a public which received with complete indifference the work of Shelley and Keats; to-day his huge and ambitious epics, such as *Kehama* and *Thalaba*, are names and nothing more to most readers of poetry. His prose *Life of Nelson*, however, is still read, as it deserves to be. Thomas CAMPBELL, again, enjoyed a great reputation while he lived; his didactic poem, *The Pleasures of Hope*, is now as completely neglected as his metrical romance, written under the influence of Scott, *Gertrude of Wyoming*. Campbell, however, wrote a few lyrics which will not soon be forgotten; a patriotic lyric like *Ye Mariners of England* gives its author a claim to remembrance, and among battle pieces there are not many

* See Sec. 33. † Published after his death.

rivals to *Hohenlinden* and the *Battle of the Baltic.* Thomas MOORE at one time enjoyed a popularity almost, if not quite, equal to Byron's; his verse for the most part is marked by glittering ornament and by insincere sentiment, though some of his lyrics have genuine pathos, and some of his satires genuine humour. On the other hand, the reputation of Walter Savage LANDOR probably stands higher than it ever did during his life-time; as an artist in prose and verse he had not the qualities that make for popularity, but there is a certain severe and massive beauty about his work which makes one hesitate before classing him as a minor poet; had he written many such lyrics as *Rose Aylmer* his place would have been more secure. Charles LAMB, who is of course mainly to be thought of as a master of prose, wrote some quaint and touching lyrics, such as *The old familiar faces*; and, finally, Leigh HUNT, the author of a great deal of pleasant prose, was also the author of verse chiefly memorable as having strongly influenced the early work of Keats.

CHAPTER XXI

LATER GEORGIAN PERIOD (1795-1832)

(*b*) PROSE

130. The Magazines. Apart from the work of any individual prose-writer, the rise of the magazine was the most important literary event of the period. In 1802 the *Edinburgh Review* was founded, in 1809 its great rival, the *Quarterly Review*; and these were speedily followed by periodicals of a lighter, more popular kind, such as *Blackwood's*, *Fraser's*, and the *London Magazine*. Many —most, indeed—of the great writers of the day availed themselves of this method of bringing their work before the public, and the development of the *essay* was the result. This does not mean that the days of the *Spectator* had returned: an essay published in the *Quarterly* was a much more solid and substantial thing than an essay by Addison or Steele, which could be read in ten minutes. One of Macaulay's contributions to the *Edinburgh*, when printed separately, fills a fair-sized volume.

Some of the essayists most famous in their own time need not now detain us long. Such men as Jeffrey and Gifford, looked upon by their contemporaries as the leading critics of the day, are now remembered chiefly as the authors of attacks on writers whom they were incapable of understanding; Jeffrey's review of Wordsworth, Gifford's of Keats, are still quoted as capital examples of critical blindness. Southey's voluminous

contributions to the magazines have not proved of permanent interest. Sydney Smith one of the founders of the *Edinburgh* and a constant contributor to it, was one of the wittiest and one of the sanest writers of the period, but unfortunately the subjects on which he wrote are not, for the most part, subjects in which we can take much interest to-day. Thomas DE QUINCEY, whose *Confessions of an Opium-eater* appeared (in the *London Magazine*) in 1821, deserves more attention. With the exception of that strange and fascinating autobiography, his writings consist almost wholly of essays; he was a journalist rather than a writer of books. In the enormous mass of his work it is not surprising that there should be great inequality, especially as he often wrote in great haste. We must judge him by his best, and at his best he showed rare gifts of imagination, of humour, and of eloquence. Above all, he was master of a certain kind of prose—the richly-coloured, elaborate, and gorgeous kind. He is studied rather for his manner than for his matter, and his manner, if one reads too much of him at a time, wearies the reader by its constant self-consciousness: one always feels that De Quincey is thinking too much about the splendour of his diction.

LOCKHART, the editor of the *Quarterly*, was another industrious journalist, and the author of a notorious review of Keats' *Endymion*; he deserves mention as the author of a delightful biography of his father-in-law, Sir Walter Scott. William COBBETT, who wrote mainly on political subjects, was often vulgar and often violent, but his style had a directness, a vigour, a raciness, which have saved some of his writings, especially the *Rural Rides*, from oblivion.

The prose work of COLERIDGE was, like his poetry, fragmentary in character. He contributed to many

periodicals, some of them started by himself, and on many subjects. In philosophy and theology his influence has been real and deep. But as a prose-writer he is best remembered by his literary criticism, and especially by his *Lectures on Shakespeare*, the first discriminating and reverent treatment of Shakespeare's work by an Englishman. These lectures, together with the *Biographia Literaria* (1817)—a book of which the most famous chapters are devoted to the poetry of Wordsworth—give Coleridge a place among the greatest of literary critics.

A place in the same circle must be found for William HAZLITT, whose volumes of essays—or, in some cases, of lectures—on Shakespeare's plays, on the Elizabethan dramatists, on the English comic writers, and on the English poets, are full of acute criticism expressed in a style of singular vigour and charm. Hazlitt's acuteness is revealed, perhaps best of all, in the portraits of eminent contemporaries which he collected into one volume entitled *The Spirit of the Age* (1825); and his charm is most powerfully exerted in the essays wherein he allows himself to speak to us in an intimate, personal manner; for instance, in the volume called *Table Talk*, or in the *Round Table* (1817). But his best and most distinctive work was his literary criticism.

131. Lamb. Both Coleridge and Hazlitt wrote and lectured on Shakespeare and the other Elizabethans, and sought to bring their contemporaries to a truer appreciation of the glorious literature of the past; but the most fruitful effort in this direction was made by Charles LAMB, whose *Specimens of the English Dramatic Poets* (1808) did for dramatic literature what Percy's *Reliques* * had done for ballad literature. The brief critical notices prefixed to each selection revealed a wonderful subtlety and delicacy

* See Sec. 117.

of judgment: in these qualities Lamb has never been surpassed. In him the tendency of Romanticism to return to the past is strikingly illustrated; he cared little for contemporary writers, except a few who, like Wordsworth and Coleridge, were his personal friends: his chief literary delight was in old authors. Allusions and quotations in his essays have led hundreds of modern readers to dip into the pages of Browne, Fuller, and other writers who were almost completely forgotten at the time when Lamb began to write. His love of the old dramatists was shown not only by the *Specimens*, but also by the *Tales from Shakespeare*, a book for children, of which part was written by his sister; by *John Woodvil*, a tragedy, not great as a play, but full of echoes of the Elizabethans; and by various essays.

It is not, however, as a literary critic that Lamb is best remembered and most dearly prized; his genius found its most perfect expression in the immortal essays which he contributed to the *London Magazine* with the signature of "Elia." There are few books that appeal to all classes of readers, to young and old, to learned and unlearned; among these fortunate few the *Essays of Elia* must certainly be numbered; and yet it is not easy to tell exactly what it is that we value in them. To say that they possess in full measure the quality which we call charm is not to explain the matter, for charm is an inexplicable thing. One fact is clear: the attraction of these writings is the attraction of the man himself; we value them as the revelation of a delightful personality. The *Essays* are written in a style which seems at first sight the most artless in the world, so easy and natural is it, so familiar and confidential; yet how delicate an art is required to reveal the whole man as these little masterpieces reveal to us the wise and witty, tender and whimsical being of whom

Southey said that "his memory will retain its fragrance as long as the best spice that ever was expended upon one of the Pharaohs!"

132. The Waverley Novels. When SCOTT found that the popularity of his verse was beginning to wane, as we have already said, he forsook poetry for prose. In 1814, searching for fishing-tackle in an old desk, he came across some forgotten manuscript; it was the opening chapters of a romance which he had begun years before, and had laid aside in deference to the advice of a friend. The novel was finished in the space of a few weeks, for no writer ever excelled Scott in rapidity of execution. It was published immediately, under the title of *Waverley*, and it at once took the reading world by storm. Twenty-eight other novels from the same industrious pen followed in the course of the next sixteen years, besides a great mass of miscellaneous prose work, including essays, biographies, and historical works.

The largest group of the *Waverley Novels* consists of stories of Scottish life. Not of contemporary Scottish life; Scott always drew his inspiration from the past, always sought to re-create the atmosphere of some bygone period, to recall some forgotten phase of civilisation. In *Waverley* he deals with the rebellion of 1745, and paints the life of a Highland clan. In *Old Mortality* he gives us a picture of the Covenanters, with their fierce fanaticism and their splendid heroism; in *Rob Roy* we are brought face to face with the racial hatreds of Highlander and Lowlander. This was followed by *The Heart of Midlothian*, containing, in Jeanie Deans, a wonderful portrait of heroic womanhood; and this, again, by *The Bride of Lammermoor*, Scott's one great love-story.

Then, in 1819, he broke new ground with *Ivanhoe*, which introduces a second group of novels, dealing with

English history. To this group belong also *Kenilworth*, *The Fortunes of Nigel*, *Peveril of the Peak*, and *The Talisman*. From English history he passed to French, but here he produced only one book which can be accounted a success—*Quentin Durward* (1823). Towards the close of his life Scott became involved, through the folly of others, in financial embarrassments. To pay his creditors he worked heroically, with powers impaired by repeated strokes of paralysis. The novels written under these conditions are comparative failures. He died in 1832.

The influence of the *Waverley Novels* has been potent and far-reaching, and not only throughout the English-speaking world; it has been felt to some extent in every country of Europe, and especially in France, Germany, and Italy. Not only was Scott the true founder of the historical novel, and of the novel of national life; his work modified men's whole way of looking at history. He has been described as "the inexhaustible painter of eight full centuries, and every type of man." His insight into the spirit of an age is as keen and unerring as his insight into the universal heart of humanity. The figure of James I., in *The Fortunes of Nigel*, is a portrait unmatched by any other historical novelist; but the picture of the times in which James I. lived is no less masterly. He has been called inaccurate, and inaccurate in small details he may occasionally be; but on the wonderful truthfulness of his general conceptions all historians are agreed. It has been said, and repeated parrot-wise, that he paints men "from the outside," that he never gets to the heart of any of his characters, that he is more keenly interested in a coat of mail than in the knight who wears it; that he is, in a word, superficial. Such a criticism is wide of the mark. It is true that he is interested in many things besides the

human heart; that he paints life in all its fulness and variety; that even picturesque details of costume are not beneath his notice. It may be true, also, that the finest shades of character escape him; his nominal heroes and heroines are often colourless. But a score of vivid and memorable figures—Jeanie Deans, and Baillie Jarvie, and the rest—rise up to testify to his thorough and intimate understanding of many types of men and women. Few competent readers, taking the great mass of Scott's work, with its rare excellence, will be unwilling to admit that the *Waverley Novels* form an achievement in creative art second only to Shakespeare's plays.

133. Minor Novelists. When Scott began to write, two classes of novel were extremely popular. One was the "tale of wonder"; the writers of this kind of story—such as Lewis, Maturin, and Mrs. Radcliffe—exhausted the resources of the terrible, the gruesome, the mysterious; they often showed real skill in suggestions of horror, but there is no real value in such work, and the very names of these novels are now almost completely forgotten. The strangest thing about them is that Scott, himself the sanest of men, admired them: his occasional use, in his novels, of the supernatural is due to their influence. Another popular kind of tale was that written to enforce some social or political or educational doctrine: what we now call the "novel with a purpose." Among such novels must be reckoned those of William GODWIN, the father-in-law of Shelley, and the author of a once-famous treatise on *Political Justice.* Many of the stories of Maria EDGEWORTH belong to this class, being written to "promote the progress of education from the cradle to the grave." She deserves to be remembered, however, not as an educational theorist, but as a humorous and sympathetic delineator of Irish life and character. Her best book,

Castle Rackrent (1800), may still be read with amusement, and is, moreover, memorable in that it gave a hint to Scott. "I felt," he says, "that something might be attempted for my own country, of the same kind with that which Miss Edgeworth so fortunately achieved for Ireland."

Another woman novelist whom Scott praised with enthusiasm, and whom in one of his own novels he attempted without much success to imitate, was Jane AUSTEN. The contrast between these two great novelists is complete. Scott ranges from peasant to king, from the tenth century to the eighteenth, from Scotland to Palestine; Miss Austen writes of one class of society, in her own time, and in her own corner of England. Scott paints a world; Miss Austen paints a village. Scott's picture is on a vast canvas; Miss Austen's, to use her own phrase, is on "a little bit of ivory two inches wide." Scott's work is touched with poetry and romance; it is full of adventures and heroisms, of great actions and great passions. Miss Austen's work is entirely prosaic and unromantic, her heroes are not at all heroic, and she never attempts to portray a great passion. She was not influenced at all by the Romantic movement of which we have been speaking; by her whole tone and temper she belongs to the eighteenth century. In all her six novels, from *Pride and Prejudice*, written in 1796, when she was a girl of twenty-one, to *Persuasion*, finished not long before her death in 1817, she is a satirist, and the theme of her satire is the ordinary daily life of the middle and upper classes in her own time. This life she observed with the most delicate precision and depicted with the finest irony; an irony so fine, indeed, that many readers have missed it, and have in consequence thought her novels pointless. Within her own narrow limits the literary workmanship of Jane Austen is well-nigh perfect.

134. Summary of the Later Georgian Period (1795-1832):—

POETRY.	PROSE.
1798. *Lyrical Ballads* (Wordsworth and Coleridge).	1796. *Pride and Prejudice* written (J. Austen).
1799. *Pleasures of Hope* (Campbell).	
1800. *Lyrical Ballads* (2nd edition).	1800. *Castle Rackrent* (M. Edgeworth).
1802. *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (Scott).	1802. *Edinburgh Review* established.
1805. *Lay of the Last Minstrel* (Scott).	
1807. *Poems* (Wordsworth).	
1808. *Specimens of the Dramatic Poets* (Lamb).	1808. *Quarterly Review* established.
1810. *Lady of the Lake* (Scott). *Curse of Kehama* (Southey).	1811. *Sense and Sensibility* (J. Austen).
1812. *Childe Harold*, I. and II. (Byron).	
1813. *Queen Mab* (Shelley).	
1814. *The Excursion* (Wordsworth).	1814. *Waverley* (Scott).
1816. *Christabel* (Coleridge).	
1817. *Poems* (Keats).	1817. *Biographia Literaria* (Coleridge).
1818. *Beppo* (Byron). *Endymion* (Keats). *Revolt of Islam* (Shelley).	1818. *Heart of Midlothian* (Scott).
1820. *Prometheus Unbound* (Shelley). *Last Poems* (Keats).	1820. *Ivanhoe* (Scott).
1821. Keats died.	1821. *Confessions of an Opium-eater* (De Quincey).
1822. *Vision of Judgment* (Byron). Shelley died.	1822. *Essays of Elia* (Lamb).
1823. *Don Juan* (Byron).	1823. *Quentin Durward* (Scott).
1824. Byron died.	1825. *Spirit of the Age* (Hazlitt).
	1832. Scott died.

CHAPTER XXII

VICTORIAN PERIOD (FROM 1832)

[NOTE.—In this chapter the treatment is much less full than in previous chapters, which dealt with periods more remote and names less familiar. With many of the great writers of the Victorian era the student may be presumed to have already some acquaintance: there is the less need for a detailed account of them. Moreover, this period—one of the fullest and richest in the history of English literature—is still too near us to be fairly judged. The world has not yet made up its mind as to what the distinctive characteristics of the period really are; it is only when looked at from a distance that the important stands out plainly from the unimportant. A brief summary, then, is all that is here attempted. Living authors are not dealt with.]

135. Carlyle. Future generations will probably decide that the most striking figure of the Victorian period was not, as in the case of so many other periods, a poet, but a prose-writer; one, however, who lacked none of the qualities of a great poet except the gift of metrical writing. Thomas CARLYLE (1795-1881) was a historian, a biographer, a philosopher, a critic of literature, and a critic of social and political institutions; but he was first and foremost a moral teacher.

Among his early essays, contributed to various reviews, that on Burns is especially noteworthy, as giving Carlyle's view of the real nature and value of poetry. But as a literary critic the greatest service he performed was to introduce to his countrymen the best German writers. By

his first published book, the *Life of Schiller*, and by numerous essays and translations, he succeeded in opening the eyes of many Englishmen to the greatness of the literature which had grown up in Germany during the later years of the eighteenth century.

As historian, Carlyle is represented by three works. The *History of the French Revolution* made him famous, and is still the most popular of his writings. The *Life and Letters of Cromwell* succeeded in upsetting the accepted opinion about the great Puritan leader. Finally, the *History of Frederick the Great* displays to the full Carlyle's most striking merits: minute and painstaking research, vivid portrait-painting, and vigorous description; but its enormous bulk seems scarcely justified by the importance of its theme.

Of Carlyle's philosophy of life, the most compact expression will be found in that most original and fantastic of autobiographies, *Sartor Resartus*, and in the lectures on *Heroes and Hero-Worship*. His opinions on the social and political movements of his time may be gleaned from *Chartism*, from *Past and Present*, and from *Latter-Day Pamphlets*. His purely biographical works are but two in number: the *Schiller* already mentioned, and the much later *Life of Sterling*, a good-humoured and wholly delightful account of a personal friend. The *Reminiscences*, written in his old age, and published after his death, contain many vivid, but few kindly or even tolerant, descriptions of contemporaries. Carlyle's own life-story has been told, and his singularly noble though not flawless character portrayed, by his friend and disciple, James Anthony Froude, in a biography which when it first appeared gave rise to bitter controversies, but which is now almost universally acknowledged to be one of the best biographies in the language.

Carlyle was above all things, as we have said, a moral teacher. The only things that seriously interested him were conduct, and character as displayed in conduct. As a historian, he took endless pains to get at the facts, and his general accuracy of statement is unassailable; but his main concern always is to lay bare, in the events of history, the working of moral forces. It is the same with his literary criticisms; he cares far more for substance than for form; far more for a man's value as a teacher than for his skill as a writer. In his own teaching there was nothing new: his hatred of shams and hypocrisies, his contempt for all that was cold and formal and conventional, his belief in the beneficence of work, his conviction that man's welfare consisted not in pleasure but in duty—many men had thought and felt in the same way before him. His greatness consisted in the power with which he uttered these old and simple truths. To all that was young and ardent in the generation that heard him his voice was as the voice of a trumpet, recalling the world to strenuous and lofty ideals which had been too much neglected.

As for Carlyle's style, it has often been held up to ridicule, and there is no doubt that he is sometimes obscure where he might be limpid, that his originality is apt to become mere eccentricity, that his vigour not seldom degenerates into violence. The tremendous energy of his utterance wearies the reader, as the ear is wearied by the din of a hammer on an anvil. But though there is no writer whom the learner may be more confidently advised *not* to imitate, we cannot call that a bad style which perfectly expresses the peculiarities of the writer's mind. The very uncouthness of Carlyle's speech reflects his originality, his hatred of the conventional; there is not a sentence, at least in what he wrote after he had formed his true style,

which does not bear the impress of his strong, vehement, and fiery spirit legibly stamped upon it.

136. Historians. Thomas Babington MACAULAY was not one of those men who, like Carlyle, win their way to fame and influence only after weary years of obscurity and neglect. To very few men has nature given so liberal a share of the qualities that make for immediate popularity. During his lifetime he was widely regarded as a true poet, an acute critic, and the greatest historian the world had ever seen; but since his death his reputation, in all three departments, has waned considerably. Of his poems, the *Lays of Ancient Rome*, with a few ballads of modern history, are the best; but no one would now claim for his spirited and ringing lines any very high poetic quality. As a literary critic he is not of great importance; as he himself candidly admitted, he had no deep insight into the principles of literature. He is to be thought of mainly as a historian, and as such he is remembered by half-a-dozen or more of brilliant historical essays, and by his great unfinished work, the *History of England.*

It is easy to understand Macaulay's popularity. He is one of the most lucid of writers; he seems incapable of writing a dull sentence; he has a rare gift of vivid and rapid narration; his wide reading and wonderful memory enable him to have always at command a copious supply of facts wherewith to enforce an argument; and he arrays such facts in the most telling way. His thought is never so profound as to tax the reader's intelligence unduly; he can say conventional things in a brilliant and effective manner. But he is not a trustworthy historian; without intending to deceive, he allows his prejudices to colour his treatment of fact. His portraits of historic personalities show but a superficial knowledge of the human heart. His style, animated, vigorous, impressive as it is, is not in the

long run satisfying; he is a consummate master of all the tricks of rhetoric, especially of the trick of antithesis; but all mannerisms become wearisome after a time.

FROUDE, already mentioned as Carlyle's biographer, wrote many books, but the great work of his life was the *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada.* Froude was accused, by his earliest critics, of habitual inaccuracy, and even of conscious dishonesty, of suppressing facts which told against his opinions and exaggerating whatever told in their favour. That he was consciously dishonest no one now maintains; that he was extremely careless about small details cannot be denied; whether he was inaccurate in matters more important than small details is a question still discussed. At all events it may be confidently asserted that Froude is the only other historical writer of the period worthy to be set beside Carlyle and Macaulay, and that as a master of prose he is greater than either; his style, never turgid and violent like Carlyle's, never showy and rhetorical like Macaulay's, has few equals for grace, for flexibility, for quiet strength.

Even without this great triumvirate the age would have been wonderfully rich in historians. We have not space for more than a few names. GROTE and THIRLWALL, who dealt with ancient Greece, and Thomas ARNOLD (the great headmaster of Rugby), who dealt with ancient Rome, are still studied. BUCKLE, who lived long enough to complete only the introduction (in three volumes) to the *History of Civilization* which he had planned, made a rash but brilliant attempt to lay bare the principles of human progress; LECKY, who wrote, among other works, a *History of Rationalism*, resembles Buckle in being the historian of ideas rather than of actions. Among members of the so-called "scientific" school, which took for its ideal a

minute and laborious accuracy, and made light of an imaginative or philosophical interpretation of facts, FREEMAN, STUBBS, and CREIGHTON were eminent; with them we may perhaps class GARDINER, who devoted his attention to the Stuart period; and John Richard GREEN, a disciple of Freeman, but with popular elements in his style which he owed to Macaulay.

137. Tennyson. During the second half of his long life, Alfred TENNYSON was regarded by most Englishmen as indisputably the greatest living poet; whether he or Browning was really the master-singer of the age is a question which we cannot here discuss. His earliest poems (setting aside the Byronic verses of his boyhood) showed a genuine gift of musical expression, but no real depth of thought or feeling. His first important work was contained in the two volumes of *Poems* (1842), including such diverse masterpieces as *Ulysses*, *The Vision of Sin*, and *Locksley Hall*. These three pieces would alone have sufficed to show that a new and original poet had arisen.

The Princess, a long narrative in blank verse, discusses the question of "woman's rights" in a manner half-serious, half-burlesque; it is hardly worthy of Tennyson's genius. We now remember it chiefly for the exquisite lyrics imbedded in it; but these were a later addition. It was followed by *In Memoriam* (1850). This great poem—which is really a collection of lyrics, all in the same metre and all inspired by the same event, the death of the poet's friend, Arthur Hallam—is something more than an elegy; it is a confession of faith. It is not merely a magnificent expression of universal human feelings, of sorrow for an irreparable loss, of helplessness in face of the darkest, most baffling problem of life; it gives a voice also to the religious doubts and difficulties peculiar to the time that

gave it birth. Here Tennyson becomes, what all the master-poets are, the spokesman of his own age.

In *Maud*, the chief actor in a tragic story of love and madness tells his own tale in a varied series of lyrics, some of which are of exquisite beauty. The twelve *Idylls of the King*,* poems in blank verse dealing with the story of King Arthur, were published by instalments, from 1859 to 1885. The Arthurian cycle† had early attracted Tennyson, as it had attracted Milton before him ; but he did not, as Milton had thought of doing, make it the subject of an epic; he saw that the different legends could not be welded into a single narrative. But a kind of unity is given to the *Idylls* by the allegorical‡ meaning which he sought to express in them ; he speaks of them as "shadowing Sense at war with Soul." That is to say, King Arthur is meant to typify the human soul in its unwearying though often baffled quest of perfection. The allegorical idea, however, is not very prominent, and these beautiful tales may be read and enjoyed without any reference to it.

In his later life Tennyson tried his hand at drama, unsuccessfully so far as fitness for the stage is a measure of success. The most important of his plays are those which deal with episodes of English history: *Queen Mary*, *Harold*, and *Becket*.

To the very end, Tennyson's mastery of words and rhythms was unabated ; and with age there came to him a freer, less studied, less decorated manner, with deeper thought and deeper music. Tennyson was, like Milton, a careful and deliberate artist; he did not pour forth his work with the inexhaustible profusion of a Byron or a Scott ; considering the length of his life, his poetical output was

* "Idyll" (Gk. *eidullion*="a little picturesque piece") should be pronounced with a long, not with a short, *i*.

† See Sec. 24. ‡ See note to Sec. 24.

small. He polished and re-polished every line; very few of his poems give the impression of having been struck off at a white heat. With all his exquisite perfection of form, we sometimes miss the elemental fire of inspiration; we would gladly exchange some of his carefully-carven ornament for a more dashing and impetuous note in the voice. His grace is apt to be a languid grace; Tennyson always charms us, but we do not feel, in his work, the compelling force of a strong personality. Nevertheless, his place is with the poets whose fame endures; whatever may become of his longer and more ambitious pieces, his short lyrics—the love songs in *Maud*, some parts of *In Memoriam*, *Crossing the Bar*, *Break, break, break*, and a score of others—have a "fervent and faultless melody" which makes them secure of immortality.

138. Browning. Tennyson, then, may stand for the type of the conscious artist, patient, deliberate, fastidious. Robert BROWNING represents the opposite type; in almost all his work, which is prodigious in quantity, we discern a certain recklessness, an impatience of restraint, a rugged energy. Far less graceful and far more forceful than Tennyson, Browning extorts our admiration by surpassing richness of mind rather than by delicacy of art.

Setting aside his early poem, *Sordello* (1840)—which is a long story from mediæval Italian history, told in rhyme, and which has become a by-word for obscurity—Browning's work falls easily into four main classes. First, there is a small group of dramas, all of them belonging to Browning's earlier life. Little need be said of these. Browning is not a great dramatist; he can portray character with extraordinary truth and insight, but does not seem able to display character *in action*, and action is of the essence of the drama. The historical play of *Strafford* is in many respects the best of Browning's plays written for the stage.

Pippa Passes, one of the most finished and beautiful of his productions, is rather a series of dramatic scenes than a drama proper; four independent scenes, from the lives of different groups of people, are linked together by the personality of the little Italian girl, who unconsciously exerts the purifying influence of her childish beauty and innocence wherever she "passes." Pippa is one of the loveliest of Browning's creations.

Next come the poems in which the poet handles *directly*—that is to say, in his own person and not through the lips of some imaginary speaker—the religious problems of his time. The most important of these poems are *Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day*, in which he discusses Christianity; *La Saisiaz*, in which he argues about immortality; and *Ferishtah's Fancies*, a collection of twelve short religious allegories in the guise of Persian fables. But perhaps the noblest of Browning's religious utterances are the two brief lyrics, *Prospice* and the famous *Epilogue to Asolando*, in each of which the faith of a brave man finds an impassioned voice.

This brings us to the third group, the lyrics. It is sometimes said that Browning's intellectual subtlety is too great to allow him to achieve success as a song-writer; but the fact is that in his lyrical poems he is often as simple as any man that has ever written. There is no obscurity in the joyous galloping measures of *How we Brought the Good News*, or the fantastic gaiety of the *Pied Piper*; not a phrase that could puzzle a child in *Hervé Riel*, the *Incident of the French Camp*, or the gallant and ringing *Cavalier Tunes*. The little snatches of song in *Pippa Passes* are beautiful in the simplest style of beauty.

Many of Browning's lyrics may, however, be more properly classed with the fourth group, the *dramatic monologues*. This form of poetry he has made peculiarly his

own; it is here that he has achieved his greatest triumphs. In the drama of action, as we have said, he was unsuccessful; in the monologue, by which a single imaginary speaker is made to lay bare his soul, Browning found the instrument he needed. The best of his poems in this form appeared in *Men and Women*, *Dramatis Personæ*, *The Ring and the Book*, and the two series of *Dramatic Idyls*. The greatest of all Browning's works, *The Ring and the Book*, is longer than most epics, but it is not an epic; it is a series of dramatic monologues, bound together by the fact that they all relate to the same story—a story which Browning took from a little manuscript book, which he picked up from a bookstall at Florence, containing an account of the trial and execution of Guido Franceschini for the murder of his wife Pompilia, at Rome in the year 1698. Out of such unpromising material Browning's genius wrought one of the noblest poems of modern times. The principal actors in the tragedy are brought forward one by one, and made to explain the motives of their action and to exhibit, consciously or unconsciously, the secrets of their hearts. Four of these—Guido, Pompilia, Caponsacchi, and, above all, the Pope—are triumphant illustrations of Browning's creative power. But even had this great work never been written, his gallery of portraits would still have been such as no other poet save Shakespeare has given to the world. Andrea del Sarto and Sludge "the medium"; the youthful David and the aged St. John; Rabbi ben Ezra and Bishop Blougram; the Greek girl Balaustion and James Lee's Wife: the list is long, and it includes men and women of many lands, of many historical periods, and of the most diverse types of mind. As Wordsworth was the poet of nature, Browning was the poet of human nature; and it is the wealth of humanity in his pages that forms his strongest title to

remembrance. To his work we may with confidence apply his own words:

> "It lives,
> If precious be the soul of man to man."

139. The Lesser Poets. Thomas HOOD and Winthrop Mackworth PRAED both belong to the last period almost as much as to this. Hood was a poet of true and rare genius, but unhappily the necessity of earning a livelihood compelled him to squander most of his time on puns. As a jester he is often inimitable, and always amusing, but most of his comic work would be gladly exchanged for a little more of such serious poetry as *The Bridge of Sighs* and *The Song of a Shirt.* Praed was an accomplished writer of light verse, the kind of verse of which Prior* had hitherto been our greatest master. It is not a lofty kind of poetry, yet it demands uncommon qualities: wit, refinement, grace, delicacy of touch—in the combination of these Praed has few equals.

To the middle part of the period belongs a name only less great than the names of Tennyson and Browning. Matthew ARNOLD devoted but a small portion of his busy life to poetry, but his poetry will in all probability survive his prose. The beauty of Arnold's verse is an austere beauty; a note of meditative melancholy is audible in it all; the best of his poems are elegies. He escaped Tennyson's fault of over-decorativeness, and Browning's fault of exuberance; a Greek severity of outline was his ideal. But the Greek quality of serenity he could not attain to; his poetry reflects, more clearly than that of any other writer, the intellectual unrest of his time. Very close to him in this respect stands his friend Arthur Hugh CLOUGH, who may be described as the poet of religious

* See Sec. 100.

doubt. Elizabeth Barrett BROWNING, the wife of Robert Browning, was a popular poetess long before her husband's name had emerged from obscurity; but her fame is not what it was. Nevertheless, her *Cry of the Children* is a memorable lyric, worthy to be set beside that other great song of pity, Hood's *Bridge of Sighs*; and her *Sonnets from the Portuguese* remain the best and sincerest expression in extant literature of a woman's love.

To a later generation belongs Dante Gabriel ROSSETTI, distinguished as a painter and as a poet. He was the son of an Italian poet and critic exiled to England, and the influence of Italian poetry is strongly felt in his own verse, with its richness of melody and warm glow of colour. Rossetti left on one side the intellectual problems, the "obstinate questionings," which had taken up so much of the attention of Tennyson, Browning, and Arnold; feeling rather than thought was what he sought to express. His sonnet-sequence, *The House of Life*, contains the most beautiful of his poems. His sister, Christina ROSSETTI, has been called the greatest of English poetesses; it is as yet too early to decide between her claims and those of Mrs. Browning. She certainly wrote nothing so piercing in its pathos as *The Cry of the Children*; but, on the other hand, she wrote many a brief and exquisite lyric which will compare favourably with anything of Mrs. Browning's. As a religious poetess she stands quite alone, not only among poetesses but among nineteenth-century poets of either sex. To find anything equal to her devotional lyrics in their own kind we have to go back to Herbert and Vaughan. William MORRIS was a voluminous writer of verse which is generally mediæval in subject, and always so in spirit; in the longest and most important of his works, *The Earthly Paradise*, he avowedly imitates Chaucer. He describes himself in a famous line as "the idle singer

of an empty day," and the description is singularly just. From the turmoil and perplexity of his time Morris turns away, to tell, in graceful and leisurely verse, his pleasant old-world tales.

140. Criticism. All Matthew Arnold's prose work was critical in spirit; he was a critic of the British nation and its institutions; a critic of popular religion; above all, a critic of literature. In dealing with the national character, the defects of which he never wearied of pointing out, his most effective weapon was a suave and smiling irony, of which he was a consummate master. Irony enters, too, into his theological writings; those who disagree with him are dealt with in a politely bantering tone which might easily be mistaken for flippancy; but beneath Arnold's wit there always lurks an intensely earnest purpose. His wit is less in evidence in his literary criticisms, some of the finest of which are to be found in the volume of *Essays in Criticism* (1865). Arnold is one of the soundest and most sympathetic of critics; in poetry, to which his best essays are devoted, he has an almost faultless taste, an almost unerring eye for the first-rate. As the enemy of all that was violent, prejudiced, and superficial, his influence on the whole subsequent course of literary criticism has been deep and salutary. He has in a rare degree the gift of compressing his thought into a striking and memorable phrase; unhappily he has also the trick of repeating that phrase until every reader is weary of it. Despite a few such mannerisms, Arnold is a great master of prose. Wit, urbanity, clearness, graceful ease, dignified vivacity, these are among the qualities which give charm and distinction to all he wrote.

Walter PATER was a fine and delicate critic both of books and of pictures; but his intense self-consciousness, his constant pre-occupation with the *manner* of his writing,

reminds us that Euphuism did not die with the Elizabethans. John Addington SYMONDS, who wrote several volumes of skilful though not inspired verse, is chiefly remembered as the historian of the Italian Renaissance and as a critic of the Elizabethan drama. Sir Leslie STEPHEN, son-in-law of Thackeray, was, like Thackeray himself,* a devoted student of eighteenth-century literature; and Richard Holt HUTTON, though his main interest lay in philosophy and theology, was also a distinguished critic of poetry. William Earnest HENLEY was a man of robust and original mind; like Johnson, he had violent likes and dislikes, but his criticism, even when it was unjust, was always stimulating. Like Johnson, too, he exercised a potent influence on a large number of younger men through his conversation.

A greater name than any of these is that of John RUSKIN, who may be fitly considered here, though it is as a moral teacher rather than as a critic that he has done his most powerful work. It was as an art-critic that he first came before the world: *Modern Painters*, *The Stones of Venice*, and *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, all completed before 1860, are the most important of his works in this direction. Even in his art-criticisms, however, the moral teacher is never silent for long; the intimate connection between art and morality was one of Ruskin's cardinal doctrines. A long list of less bulky works, dealing with a great diversity of subjects, followed. Painting and architecture interested him to the end, and there are fragments of literary criticism, often excellent, sometimes fantastic, in almost all his books. But the main work of his later life may be described as a headlong assault upon what he conceived to be the degrading and brutalising tendencies of modern civilisa-

* See Sec. 141.

tion. In this section of his work his attitude, and occasionally his style, resembled Carlyle's at more points than one.

Whatever may be thought of Ruskin's art-criticisms, or of his social theories, it must be admitted by all that he wielded English prose with the hand of a master. His earlier style is very different from his later. In *Modern Painters* he cultivates the long and rolling period, the rich glowing eloquence, of the early divines, Hooker and Jeremy Taylor. In his latest works, such as *Fors Clavigera* and the autobiographical *Præterita*, his manner is far simpler and less ornate. *Fors* has been justly described as "a masterpiece of simple, graceful, pellucid English, like the most easy and natural speech."

141. The Novelists. When we come to the prost fiction of the Victorian period we are confronted by a bewildering host of names. Fortunately, it is not difficult to determine where we must begin ; in fulness of creative power Charles DICKENS and William Makepeace THACKERAY stand pre-eminent. The former still is, and will probably long remain, the more popular of the two, since uproarious fun appeals to a greater number of minds than fine and delicate satire. Dickens has many defects ; his pathos is strained and mawkish, his sentimentalism is at times intolerable, in his plots there is a decided tendency towards vulgar sensationalism. His character-drawing is never very close to reality ; indeed, it may be said that he does not draw character at all, but only "humours,"* eccentricities, oddities, foibles. But all his defects are forgotten as we think of his unrivalled fertility in comic creation. Matthew Arnold's praise of *David Copperfield*—"What treasures of gaiety, invention, life, are in that book ! what alertness and resource ! what a soul of good-nature and

* See Sec. 68.

kindness governing the whole!"—is more or less applicable to all the greatest books of Dickens, from *Pickwick* (1838) to *Our Mutual Friend* (1864).

Thackeray, in his *English Humourists*, showed himself an excellent literary critic; in *The Four Georges* he painted a picture of eighteenth-century life which no professional historian has surpassed for vividness; in the *Roundabout Papers* he gave us a set of delightful essays. But his greatest works are the three novels of social satire, *Vanity Fair*, *Pendennis*, *The Newcomes*, and the magnificent historical romance of *Esmond*, in which he imitates throughout the manner of the essayists of Queen Anne's time. It used to be the fashion to describe Thackeray as a cynic, but from real cynicism his kindly irony is far removed. He laughs at the follies and weaknesses of humanity, but in his laughter there is an ever-present note of pity and tenderness. In charm of style Thackeray is not only immeasurably superior to Dickens, he is the superior of every other English novelist.

We must pass, with a bare mention, over the brilliant political novels of the great statesman, Benjamin DISRAELI, and the capital sea-stories of Frederick MARRYAT, the most interesting of the many successors of Smollett; over the rollicking Irish humour of Charles LEVER, and the considerable, though somewhat tawdry and theatrical, talent of Lord LYTTON. Charles KINGSLEY deserves to be remembered for his two admirable historical novels, *Westward Ho!* and *Hereward the Wake*; but in sheer narrative power, in the capacity for telling a story, it is doubtful whether he was not surpassed by his brother Henry, whose sojourn in Australia supplied material for the spirited romance of *Geoffry Hamlyn*. Charles READE wrote many pleasant novels still popular, and certainly deserves a place, even in so brief a summary as this, for

his magnificent picture of mediæval life in *The Cloister and the Hearth*. Charlotte BRONTË, the most highly-gifted member of a gifted family, lived long enough to complete three great stories—great in intensity and vehemence of passion, great in powerful and sombre imagination—the first of which was *Jane Eyre*. Mary Ann Evans, known to the world of novel-readers as GEORGE ELIOT, with perhaps less of native genius than Miss Brontë, had a far more cultivated mind, a far wider knowledge of men and women, and far larger opportunities for exercising her talents. She is seen at her best in the shortest and simplest of her novels, *Silas Marner*, and in the longest, *Middlemarch*, a wonderfully faithful study of life in an English provincial town; *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss* have also their fervent admirers. George BORROW is not usually classed as a novelist, yet there is at least as much fiction as fact in *Lavengro* and its sequel, *The Romany Rye*, two books whose charm is like the charm of nothing else in literature; they have had many imitators, but they remain unique. Robert Louis STEVENSON, in the course of "that long disease, his life," wrote poems, essays, plays, records of travel, boyish stories of adventure, historical romances, short tales, psychological parables, and novels of fantastic comedy. He fashioned for himself, by laborious efforts, a singularly captivating style, and the whimsical and attractive personality of the man shines through almost everything he wrote; but what parts of his work will live, how much of enduring vitality there is in the best of it, is for time to decide.

142. Conclusion. With the great strides made by science during this period a primer of literature has, fortunately, nothing to do. Of course these important scientific discoveries had a profound influence on literature, but the discoverers themselves do not come into our survey.

The publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, in 1859, was an event of far-reaching importance in the history of thought, but scarcely enters at all into the history of literature. Alone among the eminent scientists of the time, Thomas Huxley, the disciple and defender of Darwin, was something of a man of letters as well; he had a bright, keen, incisive style which served him well in the many controversies in which he took part. We are not concerned with the doctrines, ethical, political, or economic, of John Stuart Mill, than whom no other nineteenth-century philosopher has more powerfully swayed the minds of his contemporaries; Mill's style is admirably lucid, and lucidity was perhaps the only literary virtue he strove to possess. Lucidity is a quality, also, of the prose of Herbert Spencer, who based a comprehensive system of philosophy on the idea of evolution; most readers are conscious of a certain lack of that quality in the writings of Spencer's greatest opponent, Thomas Hill Green. Of all the speculative thinkers of the period, the only one in whose work we discern the consummate literary artist was John Henry Newman, whose style every competent reader must admire for its simplicity, its harmony, its stately ease, its quiet eloquence. With his name we may fitly bring this chapter, and this book, to a close.

143. Summary of the Victorian Period (from 1832):—

POETRY.

1833. *Pauline* (Browning).
Tennyson's first poems.
1834. Coleridge died.
1837. *Strafford* (Browning).
1842. *Poems* (Tennyson).
Lays of Ancient Rome (Macaulay).
1843. *Poems* (Elizabeth Barrett, afterwards Mrs. Browning).
1847. *The Princess* (Tennyson).
1848. Clough's first poems.
1849. Matthew Arnold's first poems.
1850. *In Memoriam* (Tennyson).
Wordsworth died.
1855. *Maud* (Tennyson).
Men and Women (Browning).
1859. *Idylls of the King*, first part (Tennyson).
1862. Christina Rossetti's first poems.
1868. *The Ring and the Book* (Browning).
The Earthly Paradise (Morris).
1870. *Poems* (D. G. Rossetti).
1889. Browning died.
1892. Tennyson died.

PROSE.

1833. *Sartor Resartus* (Carlyle).
1836. *Pickwick Papers* (Dickens).
1837. *French Revolution* (Carlyle).
1841. *Heroes and Hero-Worship* (Carlyle).
1843. *Modern Painters*, vol. I. (Ruskin).
Essays (Macaulay).
1845. *Cromwell* (Carlyle).
1847. *Jane Eyre* (C. Brontë).
Vanity Fair (Thackeray).
1848. *History of England*, vols. I. and II. (Macaulay).
1849. *David Copperfield* (Dickens).
Pendennis (Thackeray).
1851. *Stones of Venice* (Ruskin).
1854. *The Newcomes* (Thackeray).
1856. *History of England*, vol. I. (Froude).
1858. *Frederick the Great*, vol. I. (Carlyle).
1859. *Origin of Species* (Darwin).
1861. *Silas Marner* (George Eliot).
1863. Thackeray died.
1865. *Essays in Criticism* (Arnold).
1870. Dickens died.
1881. Carlyle died.

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